



St. Stephen Lutheran Church

JUNE 2026

# News & Notes

3510 72nd Street • Urbandale, IA 50322 • 515-276-4628 • [office@ststephenlutheran.org](mailto:office@ststephenlutheran.org)

## June News Summary

### From the Pastor

I have just returned from the Synod Assembly held at First Lutheran Church in Cedar Rapids. I always enjoy getting to see colleagues and renewing old friendships; as well as learning about all the activity going on in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in this country and across the globe.

Sometimes I wish I belonged to a church that focuses on sending missionaries all over the world... or a church that prioritizes eradicating world hunger... or a church that responds to natural disasters with financial aid and boots on the ground... or a church that values its youth and encourages youth ministries. That's the kind of church that I want to belong to and serve.

Well, guess what? I already belong to, and serve, that kind of church!! Did you know that that the ELCA has over 200 missionaries in 40 countries around the world? We are responding to God's call to "make disciples of all nations"!

Did you know that the ELCA raised over \$21 million to feed the hungry in this country and around the world? Plus, local congregations provide funds and food to area Food Banks! We are responding to God's call to care for "the least of these, our brothers and sisters"!

Did you know that the ELCA hosted over 16,000 youth at the National Youth Gathering in New Orleans in 2024 and is expecting an even bigger turn-out in 2027 when they meet in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Plus, they make available all kinds of resources for faith formation and youth development.

The ELCA is not a perfect institution, but every day, it strives to serve all people everywhere, as it responds to this sacred call we have from God. It is the kind of church I love and have served for 38 years. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to join you in this ministry at St. Stephen Lutheran Church.

Living in God's Amazing Grace!

Pastor Mark

## **Peace Be With You: Reflections on the 2026 Southeastern Iowa Synod Assembly By: Krista Brittain-Dial**

“Mom, can you tell me a story?” My daughter often makes this request in her sweet, sleepy voice as she’s settling in for bedtime. I remember my parents telling my brother and I bedtime stories when we were kids. These stories have a certain magic to them—there’s just something about a story to help us feel connected and peaceful. During the 2026 Southeastern Iowa Synod Assembly, we shared stories and experienced this connection with God and one another. Just like a bedtime story, sharing stories also gave us a sense of peace and really brought to life the theme of the assembly, “Peace be with you.”

Throughout the assembly, we focused on John 20:19-22, which tells the story of Jesus, just after the resurrection, appearing to the disciples who are hiding in a locked room in fear. Jesus says, “Peace be with you,” to the disciples, breathes the Holy Spirit onto them, and sends them out into the world to tell His story. Our bible study focused on four key words from this passage: **Fear, Peace, Rejoice, Sent**. During the study, we shared our own stories of these feelings, and we got to experience both the **fear** of sharing so vulnerably and the **peace** that comes from having your story heard with care and compassion.

Amidst sharing stories, we also completed the business of the assembly. We passed a balanced budget for 2027, worshipped, elected members to serve in leadership roles, passed compensation guidelines for rostered leaders in our synod, studied scripture, and reflected on the year behind us while looking forward to the year ahead. Perhaps most notably, we also re-elected Bishop Amy Current for a 6-year term serving our synod. Bishop Current reflected on how different the story of this synod assembly was from the 2020 assembly, when she was first elected. That assembly was held virtually in the early months of the COVID lock-down. We **rejoiced** in the opportunity to be together, in person for this assembly and in successfully completing the work we had set out to do.

At the end of the assembly, we were **sent** forth into our families, churches, communities, and the world to share the story of Jesus, and we were reminded again about the power of sharing our own stories and recalling our shared heritage of faith in the process of telling our stories. Our stories are woven together, and they weave us together just as we are woven together with Jesus and Jesus weaves us together. I am thankful for the opportunity to be **sent** by you, the people of St. Stephen, as a voting member of the assembly, and I’m excited to continue to share the stories of God’s presence in my life. I invite you to join me in sharing your own stories of God showing up in your fear, peace, rejoicing and being sent and hearing others’ stories. Peace be with you as you go and hear and tell.

YOU ARE INVITED TO



Register  
Here!

# ARCTIC ANIMALS

## CARE FOR CREATION

# VBS

June 7-10  
5:30-7:30 p.m.  
food, stories, crafts,  
songs, and games!

St. Stephen Lutheran Church  
3510 72<sup>nd</sup> St  
Urbandale, IA  
[ststephenlutheran.org](http://ststephenlutheran.org)  
[tracy@ststephenlutheran.org](mailto:tracy@ststephenlutheran.org)



## Grief Ministry

We have all been touched by grief at one time or another. Whether it's the loss of a loved one, loss of a job, or maybe some unresolved issue, we will all face it. But we don't have to face it alone. Comfort can be found in shared experiences and by talking about the pain we feel. We invite you to join us as we work through a resource called *Life Recovery Workbook for Grief*. This book will guide our discussion and ask some questions for us to consider. Please join us on **Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. in Room 103/105**. Please contact Pastor Chris ([clang001@luthersem.edu](mailto:clang001@luthersem.edu)) or Pastor Mark ([therevmjh@aol.com](mailto:therevmjh@aol.com)) if you would like to participate, and they will make sure we have a book for you.

## Brown Bag Book Club

The book club gathers each Wednesday at 11:30 a.m. in the office Conference Room. We are discussing *Holy Envy* by Barbara Brown Taylor.

## Prayers for Healing, Sunday, June 28

Once each month, Sunday worship includes an opportunity for individual prayer for healing and anointing (the sign of the cross placed on your forehead in oil). If you wish to receive this ministry, simply proceed to one of the healing ministers once you've received communion.

## Supper Club

Supper Club will not meet in June. The next gathering will be **Friday, July 17**, and hosted by John and Jane Dieseth.

## Summer Hymn Sings

On the 2nd and 4th Sundays in June, July, and August, please join us for a Hymn Sing prior to worship. We will gather at 9:50 a.m. when you can request to sing your favorite hymns from the ELW.

## Council Highlights – April & May 2026

### April Council Highlights

- Approved Welcome/Gathering spaces for young families, parents of Sunday School children, and youth.
- Approved updated sabbatical policy
- Approved updated privacy policy
- Blood Drive is scheduled for **Saturday, September 12**, morning hours to be determined.
- Roof repairs will be completed this week.
- Carpet for downstairs and for office areas to be done the week of May 11-15
- Elevator repairs are expected to be completed by May 15th.

### May Council Highlights

- Blood Drive is set for September 12, 9 a.m.–12 p.m.
- Tracy shared info on her Ghana trip and updates on the Parent Lounge and Youth hang-out spaces
- Elevator has been inspected and is now up and running.
- All roofing projects are now completed.
- Carpet project is completed.
- Downstairs kitchen updates are in progress.
- New and improved Internet (Metro-net) is up and running.
- Pastoral transition was discussed. Pastor Rachel Mithelman will be doing pulpit supply during August. Pastor Andrea will keep us updated on her health and when she feels healthy enough to return.
- Website options will be presented to and reviewed by Jana and Tracy. They will recommend an option to consider.

## Summer Community Music Event

Join us **Thursday, June 25** at 7:00 p.m. for our annual Summer Music Event! This year, we welcome the Ducharme-Jones Duet. Bring your lawn chairs for this family community event, held in our west parking lot. Kid activities and drinks will be provided.



Ducharme-Jones features co-writers Dave and Anne Ducharme-Jones, Iowa natives who lived in San Francisco and Austin for many years before finding their way back to the Midwest. Many of Ducharme-Jones songs are heart-felt recollections of times spent together pursuing their dreams and the search for satisfaction in their artistic process. Their songwriting is lyrical and compelling, featuring warm harmonies and melodic guitar.

**SUMMER MUSIC EVENT**

**DUCHARME-JONES DUET**

**THURSDAY, JUNE 25**  
**7:00 P.M.**  
**WEST PARKING LOT**

**ST. STEPHEN LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**3510 72ND STREET, URBANDALE**

BRING YOUR LAWN CHAIR!  
DRINKS AND KIDS' ACTIVITIES PROVIDED

EVENT WILL MOVE INSIDE IN THE EVENT OF INCLEMENT WEATHER

[STSTEPHENLUTHERAN.ORG](http://STSTEPHENLUTHERAN.ORG)

## St. Stephen Hosted First Call Theological Retreat on Monday, May 4

Bishops from the three ELCA Synods in the State of Iowa were in attendance, along with all first call pastors and deacons. Those in their first call participate for their first three years in ministry.



## Count Me In! Volunteer at St. Stephen

There are so many ways to get involved at St. Stephen! Each Sunday worship service requires anywhere from 8-12 volunteers. Outside of worship, there are opportunities in hospitality & fellowship, faith formation, music, service & care. Please complete the form at this QR code and someone from the staff will reach out to you!



## 2026 ELCA Triennial Gathering — All Women of the ELCA are Invited!

Join us at the 2026 Gathering in Des Moines, Iowa! **July 16-19, 2026**

From the website ([www.womenoftheelca.org/new-triennial-event-page](http://www.womenoftheelca.org/new-triennial-event-page)):

*The theme for the 2026 Triennial Gathering is “I Am Worthy,” based on Psalm 139:14: “I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” This statement serves as a reminder of God’s promise to be with us, even in times of devastation and division. By repeating the phrase “I am worthy,” we can recognize the Holy Spirit’s ongoing work in our lives. This practice of self-affirmation opens up opportunities for healing and restoration within ourselves, our church, society, and the world. When we declare, “I am worthy,” we align ourselves with God’s promises. There is great power in our resolve.*

Scan the QR code for more information and to register.



## Summer Office Hours

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 8:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m.

## We Need Help Watering Our Gardens this Summer!

Join us in keeping our garden areas looking beautiful! Sign up at the QR code for our weekly time slots to help water this summer. Call Jane for details!



## OUTREACH

### May 2026 Social Ministry Report

Committee Members: Jane Dieseth, Tracy Sabus, Sue Koch, Leslie Dahm

Urbandale Food Pantry Collection

For the Month of April We Collected:

10	Shampoo/Conditioner
10	Peanut Butter
7	Pasta Sauce
8	Pasta
5	Cereal
25	Toothbrushes
27	Toothpaste
2	Pkgs of Baby Wipes
1	Bottle of Soda
4	Miscellaneous

**99 Items weighing, 75 lbs.**

### Urbandale Food Pantry Collection for June, 2026

In **June** we will gather **laundry soap, cereal, Spam, boxed potatoes and snack crackers**. Please place items for the Urbandale Food Pantry in the shopping carts (Gathering Area). Financial gifts marked “food pantry” are always welcome, and can be shared in worship or sent to the church office.

### Free Little Pantry

Donate “dry goods” groceries by placing them in the Free Little Pantry itself. If there’s not enough room in the Little Pantry, overflow can be placed in the designated tote inside the Office Entry door. Please be sure to close and latch the pantry door to keep weather and critters out.

### Free Little Library

Donate books for all age groups by placing them in the designated tote inside the Office Entry door. Contact the church office for assistance with an after-hours donation.

For assistance with the Free Little Pantry or Free Little Library, please contact our team: Sarah Tomjack, Krista Dial, and Janet Davis.

## Global Greens

St. Stephen is again partnering with LSI’s Global Greens program for 2026. This program connects refugees who were farmers in their home countries to the land, infrastructure, and the business coaching they need to start their own farm business. You can see the “produce” of this program on the East lawn of the church! Please consider being a 2026 subscriber to the Global Greens Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). You’ll receive certified naturally grown vegetables raised by former refugees in Central Iowa — some of it here at St. Stephen! Subscription options



include weekly or biweekly shares, and a variety of pick-up locations. You can also buy fresh local veggies and meet the farmers at the weekly Global Greens International Market! 1907 Carpenter Ave, Des Moines; **May – October, 9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. every Saturday.** For details visit: <https://lsiowa.org/ircs-2/csa/>

## Ongoing Support for Pastors Andrea and Ronald Myers

Pastor Andrea deeply appreciates the continued prayers and support of the congregation as she recovers from her bone marrow transplant—an arduous and truly miraculous process that offers her the best hope for long-term remission from leukemia. Pastor Andrea and Pastor Ronald have returned home from Rochester and Andrea is being closely monitored through appointments at the Mayo Clinic.

We give thanks to God for their time at the Gift of Life House. Now that they are back home, MealTrain can be used once a week (on Sundays) to schedule a prepared meal to be delivered. Scan the QR code to schedule a meal or give gift cards or cash donations.



**CaringBridge Updates:** You can read updates from Pastor Andrea and Ronald at [caringbridge.org](https://www.caringbridge.org) after creating a free account. Pastor Andrea treasures every comment posted there! Andrea’s email address: [revandreamyers@gmail.com](mailto:revandreamyers@gmail.com).



## “Tour de Ghana” by Tracy Sabus

I am excited to share some meaningful news with you. This October, I have been invited to participate in Self-Help International’s mission experience in Ghana — a journey called “Tour de Ghana.” I’ll come back to that title in a moment, but first, a bit of context.

I’m an Iowa girl — born and raised in Parkersburg, a graduate of Iowa State University. I raised my family in Urbandale where I continue to live. I’ve been blessed with a good and comfortable life.

Over the past few years, though, I’ve felt a quiet but persistent nudge from the Holy Spirit — an invitation to step beyond what is familiar and safe, and to experience something that stretches me. This sense of calling has been part of my prayers, my questions, and my listening as I’ve tried to discern what God might be asking of me next.

As unexpected as it may sound, a mission trip to Ghana has become that next Holy-Spirit-Step.

This journey is an opportunity to witness and support work that strengthens communities through partnerships in food security, education, and health. It’s also an invitation to build relationships — listening with open hearts, honoring the dignity of God’s beloved children, and learning from people whose lives and experiences are very different from my own. The program that has caught my attention the most is the work of empowering women and girls, and yes — part of this experience includes me driving a three-wheeled motorcycle across the



country...hence, “Tour de Ghana.”

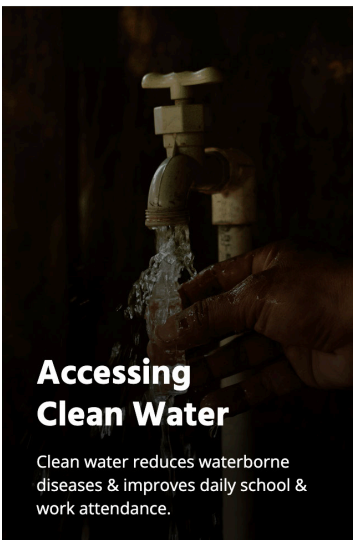
This fall, our confirmation students will be exploring a powerful baptismal promise: to serve all people, following the example of Jesus. As I prepare for this journey, I’m reminded that this calling isn’t just something we talk about — it’s something we live. Serving like Jesus often leads us beyond our comfort zones. It calls us to show up with humility, to recognize the gifts and strengths in others, and to understand that this work is not about “us helping them,” but about participating together in what God is already doing in the world.

My hope is that this journey will not only shape me, but also shape my ministry here at St. Stephen as we grow in knowing more clearly that God’s love knows no boundaries, and that we are all invited into something bigger than ourselves.

I look forward to sharing more in the months ahead. I welcome your prayers, and if you feel called, your support as I prepare for this journey.



To make a donation to Tracy’s Ghana trip, scan the QR code.



### Accessing Clean Water

Clean water reduces waterborne diseases & improves daily school & work attendance.



### Empowering Women & Girls

Women reinvest 90% of their income into their families, driving long-term economic gains.



### Ending Malnutrition

We empower women and improve vital nutrition in the first 1,000 days of life.



### Improving Agriculture

Families struggle with affording animal products, lacking irrigation for crops, and insufficient harvest.

## In Recognition of Dave Arens by Brad Edmondson

Dave Arens is one of the finest men I have ever known. In a church filled with remarkable people, Dave stands out as someone exceptionally engaged, compassionate, and dedicated in service to others. He truly embodies the spirit of a “third-class ticket” disciple. On Sunday mornings, Dave can often be found moving throughout the worship space, quietly attending to the A/V needs that help make worship possible. Over the years, he has served multiple terms on the church council, including his current role as vice president. He has also consulted on the Wonder on the Go program and, for more than 30 years, has faithfully helped guide our youth through the confirmation program.

Recently, I had the opportunity to sit down with Dave and reflect on his decades of service as a confirmation leader. What I learned was both inspiring and deeply meaningful.

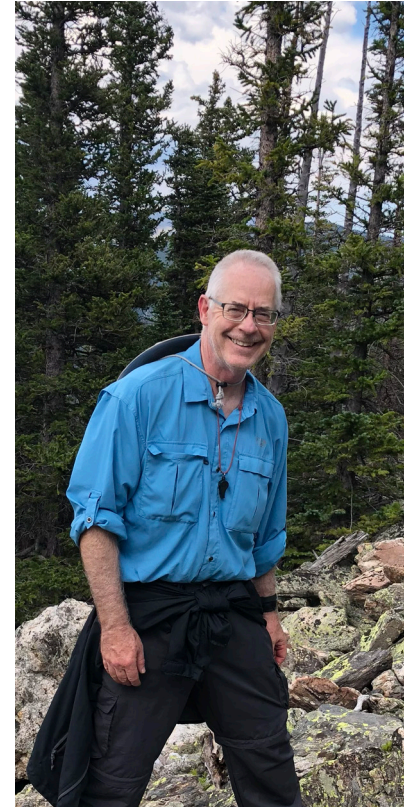
Dave grew up in Waverly, Iowa, attending St. Mary’s Catholic Church. During college, he was blessed with a strong group of friends who helped him remain grounded in his faith. After marrying Marsha, Dave became Lutheran—or, as he jokingly described it, “Catholic-lite”—and together they joined St. Stephen in 1989.

When I asked Dave why faith is so important to him, his response was immediate and unwavering: “Why is breathing so important?” It was a simple answer, yet one that perfectly captures how deeply faith is woven into the fabric of his life.

Before becoming involved in confirmation ministry, Dave gained experience teaching children through the Junior Achievement program, where he taught for three years. So when he was asked to help with confirmation, saying yes came naturally. He was fortunate to partner with Chris Gregersen, with whom he taught for many years. Over the decades, Dave has especially appreciated the energy, curiosity, and fresh perspective that middle school students bring to conversations about faith.

When asked what he enjoys most about confirmation, Dave said he believes he receives far more from the students than they receive from him. He treasures the relationships built through Wednesday night classes, Sunday gatherings, service projects, and youth trips. He also emphasized how important young people are to St. Stephen, noting how much he appreciates the church’s willingness to embrace “youthful energy” in all its forms. Dave spoke warmly of Tracy Sabus and the remarkable way she surrounds young people with caring, supportive adults who invest in their lives and faith journeys.

One of the most surprising and rewarding aspects of teaching confirmation, Dave shared, is discovering how much students truly absorb and appreciate from the experience. Sometimes a parent will mention it while their child is still in confirmation. Other times, the affirmation comes years later. You never quite know when the fruits of those efforts will appear, but when they do, they serve as powerful reminders that God is at work in ways we cannot always see. As Dave reflected, it is funny how God sends us messages precisely when we need them most.



*Continued on page 14*

## In Recognition of Dave Arens

by **Brad Edmondson** *(continued from page 13)*

After more than three decades in confirmation ministry, Dave believes that kids themselves have not changed all that much. Students still grow tremendously between sixth and eighth grade, and they continue to ask thoughtful, sincere questions about life and faith. What has changed, however, are the pressures they face. Social media, in particular, has intensified many of the challenges young people experience today. That reality, Dave emphasized, makes it even more important for youth to have positive adult role models beyond their parents—something the church is uniquely positioned to provide.

As our conversation concluded, I asked Dave if there was anything else he wanted to share. Without hesitation, he spoke about the negativity so often directed toward today's youth—the claims that they are lazy, uncaring, or disrespectful. Dave firmly rejected those stereotypes. In his experience, the opposite is true. Over more than 30 years of teaching confirmation, he has come to know young people as thoughtful, compassionate, and deeply capable individuals.

That perspective may be one of the greatest blessings his years in confirmation ministry have given him.

Thank you, Dave, for your wisdom, your faithfulness, and the countless ways you have poured love, encouragement, and guidance into the lives of our youth.

## June Celebrations

### June Birthdays

June 1 David Hintz, Chris Nelsen  
June 2 Clara Kuker  
June 6 Mary Hintz  
June 9 Shelby Niceswanger  
June 10 Peg Gilchrist, Lynn Rappold  
June 12 Missy Boerner, Avery Harding  
June 17 Anne Guthrie, Dennis Hubert, Larry Huntley  
June 18 Don Herman, Dick Koepplin  
June 19 Beth Bishop, Ben Edmondson, Colin Richard  
June 21 John Dieseth, Sherry Schaffer  
June 23 Gloria Herman  
June 25 Archer Freeman,  
June 26 Emily Harding, Ruth Schlesinger

### June Anniversaries

June 5 Steve & Sue Johnson, John & Janet William, Jr.  
June 6 Carol & Dick Koepplin  
June 8 Cyndy & Steve Quam, Ann & Rob Torry  
June 9 Charlene & Gordon Jorgensen  
June 11 Tara & Dave Amundson, Noreen & Dale Christians  
June 16 Donna & Dan Schroeder  
June 21 Julia & Ted Hoeger  
June 22 Vickie & Hugh Ceaser  
June 23 Dana & Steve Nelson  
June 24 Diane & David Bolender  
June 25 Karen & Dave Fachman  
June 27 Beth & Dave Bishop, Gayle & Art Gustafson

## June Calendar

### Wednesday, June 3

- Brown Bag Book Club**, 11:30 a.m.
- SSLC Band Rehearsal**, 6:15 p.m.
- Grief Ministry Group**, 6:30 p.m.

### Thursday, June 4

- AA Meeting**, 6:30 a.m.

### Saturday, June 6

- Redeemed Fellowship Rehearsal**, 1 p.m.
- Redeemed Fellowship Center**, 4 p.m.

### Sunday, June 7

- Holy Communion**, 10 a.m.
- Coffee and Donuts Fellowship**, 11 a.m.
- RFC Worship**, 12 & 5 p.m.
- Vacation Bible School**, 5:30 p.m.

### Monday, June 8

- Vacation Bible School**, 5:30 p.m.

### Tuesday, June 9

- Vacation Bible School**, 5:30 p.m.
- Executive Committee Meeting**, 7:00 p.m.

### Wednesday, June 10

- Brown Bag Book Club**, 11:30 a.m.
- Vacation Bible School**, 5:30 p.m.

### Thursday, June 11

- AA Meeting**, 6:30 p.m.

### Saturday, June 13

- St. Stephen Crafters**, 10 a.m.
- Redeemed Fellowship Rehearsal**, 1 p.m.
- Redeemed Fellowship Center**, 4 p.m.

### Sunday, June 14

- Holy Communion**, 10 a.m.
- Coffee and Donuts Fellowship**, 11 a.m.
- RFC Worship**, 12 & 5 p.m.

### Tuesday, June 16

- SSLC Band Rehearsal**, 6:15 p.m.

### Wednesday, June 17

- Brown Bag Book Club**, 11:30 a.m.
- Grief Ministry Group**, 6:30 p.m.

### Thursday, June 18

- Care Companions**, 4:00 p.m.
- AA Meeting**, 6:30 p.m.

### Saturday, June 20

- Property Committee**, 8 a.m.
- Redeemed Fellowship Rehearsal**, 1 p.m.
- Redeemed Fellowship Center**, 4 p.m.

### Sunday, June 21

- Holy Communion**, 10 a.m.
- Coffee and Donuts Fellowship**, 11 a.m.
- RFC Worship**, 12 & 5 p.m.

### Tuesday, June 23

- Council Meeting**, 7 p.m.

### Wednesday, June 24

- Brown Bag Book Club**, 11:30 a.m.
- SSLC Band Rehearsal**, 6:15 p.m.
- Grief Ministry Group**, 6:30 p.m.

### Thursday, June 25

- AA Meeting**, 6:30 p.m.
- Summer Community Music Event**, 7 –p.m.

### Saturday, June 27

- Redeemed Fellowship Rehearsal**, 1 p.m.
- Redeemed Fellowship Center**, 4 p.m.

### Sunday, June 28

- Holy Communion & Healing Prayers**, 10 a.m.
- Private Event**, 11 a.m.
- Coffee and Donuts Fellowship**, 11 a.m.
- RFC Worship**, 12 & 5 p.m.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church  
3510 72nd St.  
Urbandale, IA 50322  
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



## **“Wonder on the Go” Facebook Page and Instagram QR Codes**

We are launching St. Stephen’s “Wonder on the Go” ministry for the fall the week after Easter. You can help us by following our “Wonder on the Go” Facebook and Instagram pages. You may use the QR codes below. Thanks!

***Wonder on the Go Facebook Page***



***Wonder on the Go Instagram Page***

