

AND HE WILL BE CALLED

Wonderful
Counselor
MIGHTY GOD
Everlasting
FATHER
Prince of Peace

ISAIAH 9:6

connections

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2023

It's hard to find a church these days as old as St. Mark's - 138 years old on November 8! And it's even harder to find one as thriving as St. Mark's! Happy birthday St. Mark's, or should I say *"The Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Saron Congregation of Cedar Rapids"*?

St. Mark's was started in 1885 by 16 charter members who averaged 28 years old and had all been born in Sweden. Church services were in Swedish and the first year's offering amounted to a whopping \$125 (which is around \$4,000 today). When you consider its humble beginnings, our church has really been blessed by God!

Let that sink in for a bit. 16 people committed their time and money to start a new church and I wonder how many of them ever thought their little Swedish church would become a thriving, 2,000 partner church! Of course, we made many bold moves as a church over the years to get to this point. Let me share a few that I think are particularly bold:

• **1891:** We bought a piece of land and built our first church at 2nd Ave and 3rd St SW, Cedar Rapids. It was a traditional rectangular church with a sloped roof and a steeple.

• **1911:** Under the leadership of Pastor E. C. Jesup, we started offering worship services in English. While this might seem like a no-brainer in the US today, back then it was a momentous and sometimes contentious change to speak "the language of the people."

• **1914:** To identify more readily with our English-speaking culture, the church was renamed to "Saron English Lutheran Church."

• **1916:** Women were allowed to vote at our church even though the state of Iowa had just denied women that opportunity in state elections (Iowa wouldn't change this until 1919). Imagine the counter-cultural boldness of our congregation!

• **Around 1920:** We assimilated into our church the Danish Lutheran Church of Cedar Rapids. Today we call this a "church merger" where a healthy church accepts the remnant of another church.

• **1945:** We changed our name once again to "St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church" and began looking for a new location to build because we were outgrowing our previous one.

• **Tragedy struck on December 1, 1946:** A fire and explosion destroyed the original church building. We happened to be without a pastor at the time, so we found ourselves without a building and a pastor for the first time in 57 years.

• **July 10, 1949:** After great perseverance and with much patience, we dedicated a newly constructed church building on 1st Ave and 21st St NE which still stands to this day.

• **1985:** We were registered in the state of Iowa under the name "St. Mark's Lutheran Church of Cedar Rapids, Iowa." We have officially held this name since then.

• **1997:** The land for our current location was donated. After much discussion, debate and prayer we decided to take the leap of faith and build a new church building. On May 2, 1999, we officially moved in.

• **2011:** God blessed the growth of our church after our move and in 2011 we added on the Faith Worship Center and more space for education and offices to our current location. During this time we also joined the LCMC, Lutheran Churches in Mission for Christ, the denomination with which we are affiliated.

• **2021:** Finally, in response to the pandemic, we created a livestream ministry which launched on January 3, 2021 and now sees over 100 individual logins every Sunday.

It's definitely only by God's grace that we have seen the growth we have had over 138 years of ministry. Inspired by God's grace, we have made crucial and bold moves at just the right time to see new growth. I believe we are at one of those crucial times once again as we look to change our name to FaithLife Church and march boldly into our 140th year of ministry.

Please mark Sunday, January 28, 2024 on your calendar for a Voters' Meeting to take place to resolve to "do business as (DBA) FaithLife Church" (we are not planning as of this time to change our name with the state of Iowa, but only to file a "DBA" which allows us to do business as "FaithLife Church").

If you would like more information about this planned name change, we are offering three more "Feedback Forums" on the following dates:

- Thursday, November 16 at 4:00 pm
- Tuesday, January 9 at 5:30 pm
- Sunday, January 14 at 2:00 pm

It's time for more bold moves! Let's praise God for 138 years of ministry and mission and move forward connecting faith and life every day!

Pastor Paul Hennings



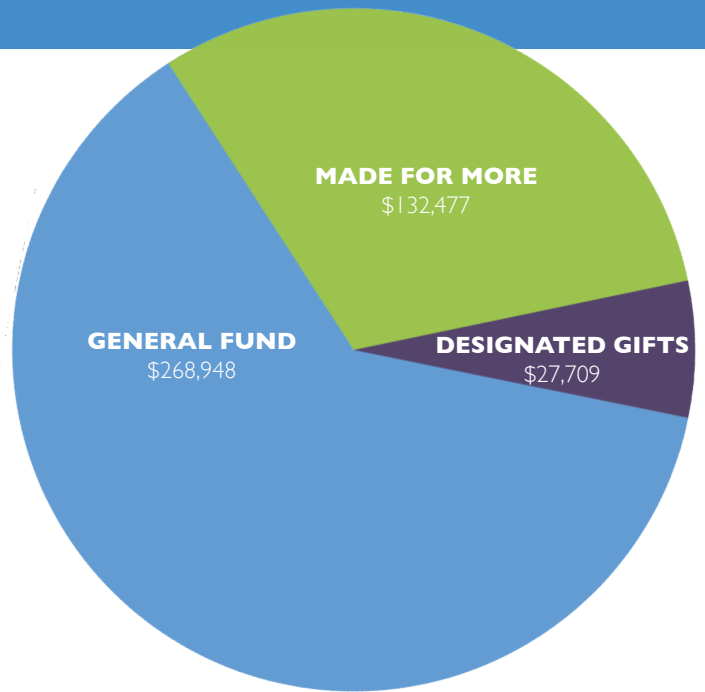
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QUARTERLY GIVING UPDATE

GIVING UPDATE

The graph to the right shows giving at St. Mark's for the first quarter of our fiscal year (July-September 2023).

The General Fund is where your tithes and offerings go. It provides staff salaries, utilities, our programming, RightNow Media access, licensing for hymns, liturgy, and songs ... the list goes on and on! It's the fund that allows us to reach people with the gospel through our weekend services, family ministries, service opportunities, missions, and more.



SEMINARIAN UPDATE

John Mosinski, Pastoral Support | Pastoral Intern

Your Pastoral Interns, Michele Jones, Alice Murray, and myself have been busy with classes and "other requirements as assigned" since the school year began in August! We are in our sixth and final year before receiving our Masters of Divinity from the Masters' Institute. Our graduation date is scheduled for May 18, 2024! Please keep us in your prayers - we are so close but have a heavy workload this year!

Our **August** class was titled "Missio Dei" and required more reading than we had expected/anticipated/ever done before. We each packed 2 - 3" of paper into a 3-ring binder and read many articles and book sections on God's mission here in the world.

Our **September** class was "Gender Equality in Leadership". We were invited to read a wonderful book titled *The Blue Parakeet*, which helped us in rethinking how we read the Bible. Several appendices were also wonderful in highlighting the first century women, including the "New Women of Rome", and the women of Romans 16 (Junia is not alone). I had often glossed over this last chapter, but Paul specifically calls out certain women as "well known to the apostles" and those who "were in Christ before me".

We took two classes in **October**. In the first class, Leadership and Prayer; we focused on Nehemiah and how to be constantly in prayer (through four classic prayer paths and the Lectio Divina).

Our second class was called "The Heart and Theology of Worship." We learned about Jewish worship practices from before the time of Christ through the first century Christian worship, through changes in medieval times, to modern day worship.

Our **November** class is titled Dynamics of Pneumatology (a five dollar word for Christian theology concerned with the Holy Spirit!) Our **December** class is on the book of Psalms. We've also got a couple of year-long projects in the hopper: our Capstone Project, a theology paper on a topic of our choice, and the Ministry Toolbox, which is another major project.



CONTACT

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2024 EVENTS

NIGHT TO SHINE

Night to Shine, sponsored by the Tim Tebow Foundation, is an unforgettable prom night experience, centered on God's love, for individuals with special needs, ages 14 and older.

On February 9, 2024, St. Mark's will host Night to Shine for the seventh year sharing God's love. Each guest will be crowned king or queen of the prom and enjoy the royal treatment, including hair styling and makeup application, shoe shining, a limousine ride, corsages and boutonnieres, karaoke, a catered dinner, prom favors and the red carpet.

As a host church, St. Mark's is part of a worldwide movement of over 700 churches representing 36 denominations and over 200,000 volunteers in 50 states and 34 countries participating in a Night to Shine prom on the same night. It is an amazing evening, not only for guests to shine, but most importantly, Christ's love to shine.

Night to Shine needs as many as 300 volunteers to make this an incredible event for our guests and their families. We have roles of all kinds, from Buddies, Food and Beverage Service, Red Carpet Team and Cheering Section, Guest and Volunteer Check In Teams and so much more! To learn more and to register, visit stmarkscr.org/nighttoshine

If you have any questions about volunteering, please email Nicole Studt at ndstuds@gmail.com We look forward to celebrating all our Kings and Queens of the prom on Friday, February 9, 2024!

Night to Shine 2024 Planning Team

Tana Bieber-Moffatt

R. J. Hojka

Cheri Presley

Megan Render

Pam Schulz

Nicole Studt, Team Leader

Diane Wolf

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

stmarkscr.org/nighttoshine



WELCOME CLASS

St. Mark's hosts a Welcome Class each quarter. This class is an opportunity to meet staff members, learn more about our church, missions, values, how to use your strengths to connect in our congregation, and tour our building. A meal will be provided and childcare is available. If you or someone you know is interested, please visit stmarkscr.org/welcomeclass to register.

2024 WELCOME CLASS DATES

Sunday, January 21
11:30 am - 1:30 pm

Thursday, April 25
6:00-8:00 pm

Thursday, July 11
6:00-8:00 pm

Sunday, November 3
11:30 am-1:30 pm

ALICE MURRAY,
DIRECTOR OF CARE
AND HOSPITALITY

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GRIEF SHARE

We are currently halfway through a session of GriefShare. It is a great program that helps those experiencing seasons of grief to be able to process and talk with others who are on the same painful journey. We will be offering another GriefShare session in Winter 2024.



SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS SEMINAR

When you're grieving the death of a family member or friend, you may dread the holiday season. Thoughts of social gatherings, family traditions,

and obligations leave you anxious and overwhelmed. You may wish you could skip these next two months and go straight to the routine of the next year—but you can't.

To help, encourage, and support each other who are experiencing grief, we will be offering a free two-hour **Surviving the Holidays** GriefShare seminar on Thursday, November 9 from 6:00-8:00 pm. Register at stmarkscr.org/events or by calling the church office at 319-447-0100. Please make sure to invite your friends, family, or someone you know who would benefit from this seminar.

SPIRITUAL PARENTING

We have started a Spiritual Parenting class on Wednesday evenings. It is a great way to talk about our own faith and how to help our kids be able to talk about theirs. The book study provides practical examples and Biblical insight on the spiritual role of parenting. We will be offering this class again in Summer 2024!

LEARN *AND LIVE* YOUR STRENGTHS!

Do you ever wonder why your spouse or co-worker is such an efficient organizer? Or why he or she can always explain in great detail and enthusiasm an incident that happened during their day? Or why they are clueless when you've obviously had a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day?

It's because God has wired each of us differently. He's given each of us a different set of ways in which we naturally think, feel, and behave. We know these as CliftonStrengths, and we want to help you understand your Strengths and how to apply them in all areas of your life.

We believe that a wonderfully effective way to develop and empower people is to help them use their Strengths. That's why we continue to focus on CliftonStrengths as part of our Spiritual Growth Plan as we live out our FaithLife. According to Gallup's research, *"people who focus on using their strengths are three times as likely to report having an excellent quality of life."* Improve your quality of life and join us for a strengths class!

2024 WINTER CLASSES

- Tuesday, January 30: Intro to Strengths
- Thursday, February 29: Strengths-based Marriage
- Tuesday, March 19: Strengths-based Leadership

You can register for upcoming classes on our website:

stmarkscr.org/strengths

SARAH BARTLETT
DIRECTOR OF
FAITHLIFE MINISTRIES
& CERTIFIED
STRENGTHS COACH




CONTACT

sbartlett@faith-life.org


NOVEMBER ²⁰/₂₃

SUNDAY SERVICES 8:30 AM TRADITIONAL & 10:00 AM MODERN • ON-SITE • ONLINE • ON DEMAND

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1 Feedback Forum with Pastor Paul 6:00 pm Register at stmarkscr.org/events	2	3 <i>Connections mail date</i>	4
5 All Saints Sunday at both services	6	7	8	9 Surviving the Holidays GriefShare seminar 6:00-8:00 pm Register at stmarkscr.org/events	10	11
12 ADVENTURE into Christmas workshop 3:00-5:00 pm Register at stmarkscr.org/christmas	13	14	15	16 50+ Potluck 11:00 am Feedback Forum with Pastor Paul 4:00 pm	17 Mission of Hope Monthly Meal	18  Bell Ringing One-hour volunteer shifts 10:00 am-4:00 pm Register to ring: stmarkscr.org/christmas
19 First Communion at both services	20	21	22 Thanksgiving Eve service at Noelridge Christian Church 7:00 pm	23 Happy Thanksgiving! Church office closed.	24	25
26 Giving Tree Get your Giving Tree tags on 11/12, 11/19, and 11/26	27	28	29	30		

DECEMBER 2023

SUNDAY SERVICES 8:30 AM TRADITIONAL & 10:00 AM MODERN • ON-SITE • ONLINE • ON DEMAND

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2  Bell Ringing One-hour volunteer shifts 10:00 am-4:00 pm Register to ring: stmarkscr.org/christmas
3 Christmas in Faith Concert at 3:00 pm	4	5 Women's Christmas Dinner at 5:30 pm Buy tickets by 11/27 at stmarkscr.org/christmas	6	7	8	
9 Holiday Flair Wear your best Christmas sweaters and flair to services!	10	11	12	13	14	15
					<i>The Living Story</i> 5:00-7:00 pm each night stmarkscr.org/livingstory	
16 Christmas Cantata at 8:30 am traditional service	17	18	19	20	21	22
23 Christmas Eve Services MODERN 10:00 am, 4:00 pm TRADITIONAL 8:30 am, 4:30 & 11:00 pm	24 <i>Merry Christmas!</i> Church office closed.	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	1	2	3	4	5
	HAPPY NEW YEAR! Church office closed.					2024 DATES TO KNOW! 2/9 Night to Shine 3/17 Panama FaithLife Trip 3/31 Easter Sunday

CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS AT ST. MARK'S

We look forward to celebrating the Savior's birth with you and your family! Our website stmarkscr.org/christmas will stay updated with all dates and details.

NOVEMBER 12 • ADVENTURE INTO CHRISTMAS

Participants will learn what Advent means and be given ideas for creating family Advent traditions to cherish for years to come. Participants will receive an Advent kit that includes ornaments for creating a Jesse Tree and other Advent activities. Cost is \$25/participant. Register at stmarkscr.org/christmas

DECEMBER 3 • CHRISTMAS IN FAITH CONCERT

Join us for a free holiday concert beginning at 3:00 pm featuring the OPUS 695 organ with vocalists and instruments. Reception to follow. *Reception sponsored by the St. Mark's Lutheran Church Foundation.*

DECEMBER 5 • WOMEN'S CHRISTMAS DINNER

The Women's Christmas Dinner is an annual St. Mark's tradition complete with a catered meal, entertainment, fair-trade gifts for sale, door prizes, and more. This year's entertainment is the Sarah Schmidt Family. Tickets are \$20/each and are available to purchase at stmarkscr.org/christmas OR on-site in The Connections Cafe each Sunday in November.

DECEMBER 10 • UGLY SWEATER SUNDAY

Wear your "festive flair" to worship services on Sunday, December 10! No judging what you come up with!

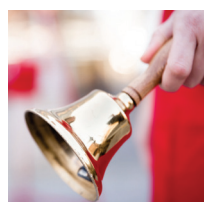
DECEMBER 17 • CHRISTMAS CANTATA

This year's cantata is "What Child Is This?" by John Leavitt. It tells the miracle of Christmas through spoken scripture passages and beautiful music. There will be opportunities for the congregation to join in the singing of some of the carols. Our Chancel Choir and community musicians are excited to share this beautiful service with you at our 8:30 am traditional service.



GIVING TREE

Our display and sign up with gift tags will be in The Connections Cafe on November 12, 19, and 26. We have over 300 gifts this year to help those in our community!



SALVATION ARMY BELL RINGING

Help us spread Christmas cheer! We have one-hour shifts available on November 18 and December 2 at three grocery stores! Register at stmarkscr.org/christmas

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24

Join us for a hope-filled message and beloved Christmas music. With Christmas Eve falling on Sunday this year, we will host five separate services. ALL services will conclude with "Silent Night" by candlelight.

MORNING

8:30 am traditional

10:00 am modern

Hour-long services with communion, livestream, and nursery

EVENING

4:00 pm modern

4:30 pm traditional

30-minute family friendly services

11:00 pm traditional

Our classic candlelight service

THE LIVING STORY

We're back FOUR more!



DECEMBER 14-16

The Living Story is back for the fourth year! Our drive-thru live nativity attracts hundreds of individuals each year and we can't wait to share the Christmas story while exploring the power of Jesus' names!

We need your help to make this possible! We have split each night into two volunteer shifts with a 1.5 hour time commitment (one hour outside in your position). Registration opens soon at stmarkscr.org/livingstory

SUNDAYS

SUNDAY SCHOOL We have been averaging 25 students on Sunday mornings. A majority of these kids are in Kindergarten and 1st grade. If you have a 3-5 year old preschool/Pre-K student, we encourage you to bring them to Sunday School each week from 10:00-11:00 am. The kids love singing with Mr. Dave, playing with toys, hearing Bible stories, and making crafts.

THE EDGE This fall students have had the opportunity to learn from a variety of leaders on topics ranging from faithfulness to making our faith known to others. Coming off of the summer mission trip, we were on a spiritual high from witnessing God move in miraculous ways. In the past few months we have had to learn how to be faithful in the valley as we all gotten back into our daily routines. We ask for prayers as we discern how to honor God in a high school setting.



WEDNESDAYS

We have been averaging 160 kids on Wednesday nights with 29 volunteers. Some of our “small” groups have grown pretty big! We would love to be able to split some of these big groups into smaller groups, but that means we need more volunteers! Our Wednesday nights consist of worship, dinner, large group teaching, game/service project, and small group time.

CONFIRMATION



In October 2023, we had 22 8th grade students affirm their baptism through Confirmation. It has been such a treat to walk alongside this group of young adults as they write their faith statements to share with their family and friends. These statements are filled with stories of how God has impacted their lives and what they understand to be true about Him.

Our new Confirmation program is going incredibly well! We have 24 students who have made the decision for themselves to dive deeper into what they believe to be true about God and wrestle with difficult questions. We’ve been meeting weekly to share a meal, work through Teen Alpha, and have small group discussion. In the spring we will transition to more conversation on the Small Catechism and why being a Lutheran is so great. This group of students will be confirmed in May as we reflect on all they’ve learned.

A BIG thank you to all our volunteers that support Family Ministry, love our students, and contribute to the success of our ministry!

- Mark Ammons
- Krystal Austad
- Sarah Bartlett
- Mark Bauermeister
- Andrew & Aurelie Berta
- Jessica Blake
- Lindsay Blood
- Daron & Kelly Buch
- Jessica & Tommy Bures
- Mary Ehlinger
- Mark Freed
- Jason Freeman
- Joanna Hein
- Maddie Hora
- Kelsey Infanger
- Joni Lahr
- Robyn Ledger
- Amy Lorenz
- Ellie McAllister
- Josie Moore
- Mary Morton
- Avery Nicholls
- Brenda Ohrt
- Alisa Oliver
- Austin Patton
- Trish Recker
- Jake Render
- Tana & Dane Schneyer
- Jackson Schulz
- Carrie Severson
- Khrystle Sullivan
- Kelly Vieth
- Deb & Greg Voss
- Grace Winterhof
- Ben Young

LOCAL MISSIONS

As I reflect back on this fall, I am so thankful for all the ways St. Mark's partners have served their neighbor. From **Beautiful Week**, to serving monthly at **Mission of Hope**, or being a coach at **Hope CDA**, God is working through and in those who are giving their time and investing in relationships outside the church walls.

As we turn the corner into the Christmas season, we are helping our friends at **Salvation Army** by ringing bells on November 18 and December 2. **The Giving Tree** will bless children around our community, including the Wellington Heights Community Church Christmas Store.

Our annual **Souper Saturday** food drive will be held at local Fareway stores on February 3, 2024. We are looking to start a **Freezer Meal Ministry** along with our friends at Wellington Heights Community Church. If you are interested in being involved, let me know.

FAITHLIFE HOMES

FaithLife Homes continues to progress. The home has a new roof and soon will have new windows and siding installed. Thank you to all who participated in our live poll during both services in October!



Grey was the overwhelming color choice with 75% of the votes. Progress on the renovation will continue through the winter with an April completion date. Our timeline has our first tenant move in on May 1.

UPCOMING EVENT

We are excited to partner with the **Catherine McAuley Center** again on Monday, March 18 to host another poverty simulation at St. Mark's. This is a great exercise for all ages to get a glimpse of the struggles that come with poverty in Linn County.



CONTACT
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PANAMA



Our new mission opportunity continues to grow! St. Mark's welcomed our **CALMS Panama representative, Milton Castillo**, on his visit to the United States in October. This was his first visit to Iowa and he enjoyed meeting the partners of St. Mark's. He was able to experience an Iowa farm and a tour of the John Deere factory in Waterloo!

Our November FaithLife trip was delayed due to schools being closed because of a disputed mining contract that was signed into law. We are planning on returning in March 2024. If you would like to join the current team to serve in Panama, turn in the application by Friday, December 8. We are interested in including some medical professionals on our team. If you are a medical professional and are interested in serving the families of Las Perlas school, I would love to have a conversation with you!

HAITI

Despite the uncertainty in Haiti, the children at UCI are still able to attend school. Praise God for this! Those sponsoring students will be sending gifts in two gallon Ziploc bags to bless them for Christmas. For many, this is the only Christmas gift they will receive. If you would like to sponsor a child (\$180 per year) or bless a child this Christmas, contact me for further details. These gifts will be mailed on Tuesday, November 14.

Please continue to pray that water is found for the community that St. Mark's so generously funded during our August "Walk for Water" fundraising campaign! The initial attempt did not find water. Stay tuned to future updates on when the two wells are completed.

TRUNK OR TREAT PHOTOS • OCTOBER 25, 2023





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Church office hours:

Monday - Thursday: 8:30 am - 4:30 pm
Friday: 8:30 am - 12:30 pm

Website: stmarkscr.org
Phone: 319-447-0100
Text Alerts: Text **STMARKSCR** to **94-000**

Current Worship Schedule:

8:30 am | Traditional: the majesty of liturgy,
pipe organ, & choral music - in Faith Worship Center

10:00 am | Modern: joyful worship in a casual setting
- in Life Worship Center

WATCH LIVE: A livestream of each service is available by clicking the **WATCH LIVE** button at stmarkscr.org

ST. MARK'S LUTHERAN CHURCH FOUNDATION



MAKE A LASTING DIFFERENCE

As the end of the year draws near, it's a good time to consider donations and taxes. While the St. Mark's Lutheran Church Foundation encourages and accepts donations from all, there are special opportunities for those who are 70½ and older. By instructing your IRA administrator to make a distribution from your IRA directly to the St. Mark's Lutheran Church Foundation, you can make a qualified charitable distribution with no tax obligations to you. Please consult your tax advisor as there are limitations and each person's tax situation varies.

How an IRA Qualified Charitable Distribution Works

- Direct a transfer from your IRA account to St. Mark's Lutheran Church Foundation.
- Exclude the gift amount from your income for federal tax purposes.
- Count the gift toward your required minimum distribution.
- Make a lasting gift to the St. Mark's Foundation which benefits St. Mark's forever.

Information to provide your IRA administrator:

St. Mark's Lutheran Church Foundation
501(c)(3) non-profit organization, TIN #42-1070537
8300 C Avenue
Marion, IA 52302

To learn more about the Foundation, please watch the video on our website (stmarkscrfoundation.org/about-us) and reach out to the St. Mark's Lutheran Church Foundation President, Tim Wuest at 319-393-0170.