FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Mother-Daughter Congregations Reunite, Taking Bold Steps for the Future**

Greenleaf, Wisconsin August 24th, 2021

St. John Lutheran Church in Wrightstown (WELS) and St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Greenleaf (WELS) are taking bold steps with the future in mind. St. Paul’s is closing its ministry at the same time as St. John is combining its church and school sites onto a single campus on County D (Plum Road). Until the new site is built, St. John will be worshiping at St. Paul’s facility in Greenleaf.

Pastor Dave Ruddat, pastor at St. Paul’s in Greenleaf and Immanuel Lutheran in Shirley, spoke of the history between St. John and St. Paul’s: “Both congregations don’t just have a shared confession of beliefs, we also have a history together. Back in 1909, when members of St. John who lived in the Greenleaf area felt that the distance to Wrightstown was just too far and that the Greenleaf area also needed a church, they made the bold steps to form a daughter congregation here.” The bold steps continue, as Pastor Ruddat detailed a recent decision made at a St. Paul’s voters meeting: “When the members heard that there might possibly be a buyer for St. John and that they might need a place to worship, we voted unanimously to offer St. John all our property to them for free for as long as they needed it, with the understanding that they could sell it later to fund their ministry. Mother-daughter congregations united again! What an interesting end for one congregation and a memorable transition for another!”

St. John in Wrightstown has taken some bold steps of its own regarding its property and mission. Pastor Mike Gehl explains: “Although the church’s mission will forever be to share Jesus with its members and with the community, the current facilities, in many ways, aren’t ideal for carrying out twenty-first century ministry.” Two years ago, St. John sold its 75-year-old school building, located at the intersection of Clay and Turner Streets, to the Village of Wrightstown for a still-to-be-determined purpose. The Village is allowing the school to continue to hold classes at that location until the new facility is built. And most recently, a Minnesota musician and businessman, Walter Croll, is in the process of purchasing the historic 110-year-old church building to be used for music lessons and recitals. Two remaining parcels, the church parsonage and an empty lot, will be offered for sale later.

Bold steps also lie ahead for St. John. Decades-old plans to build new facilities have finally been put into action. Pastor Gehl explains: “Phase 1 is to build brand-new preschool through 8th grade classrooms, administrative offices, a gymnasium, and a commons area. A future Phase 2 will be the church gathering and worship spaces. The commons will be used exclusively for worship until the sanctuary is built. The ambitious target is to occupy the building sometime during the 2022-23 school year, Lord willing.” Excel Engineering of Fond du Lac is assisting the congregation as architect and Catalyst Construction of Milwaukee has been selected as the builder.

September is going to be a busy time for both congregations. St. Paul’s members will be transferring membership to St. John, Immanuel, or other congregations, as well as deciding what to do with remaining assets. “It’s a sad and exciting time,” Pastor Gehl explains, “and it’s happening a lot faster than I think anyone anticipated, putting our faith to the test. But it’s amazing what God’s people can and will do when they love their Savior and his kingdom!” Pastor Ruddat echoes the sentiment: “It’s a hard thing sometimes to do what’s best for Christ’s kingdom, but these bold steps are taken in faith that Jesus will provide… and he will!”

Special worship services are planned on September 26th, both at St. Paul’s and at St. John. On October 3rd, St. John will begin worshiping at the Greenleaf location, offering two Sunday morning services. A Thursday evening service will be added in mid-October.

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