



# PANTHER PULSE



## A 1st Lutheran School Update

### A LETTER FROM MR. FISHBURN, PRINCIPAL

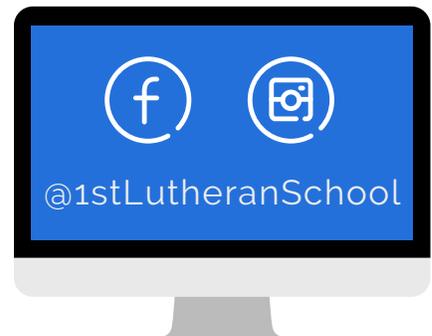
Dear Alumni and Friends,

God continues to remain Faithful to 1st Lutheran School! There is much to rejoice over and continue to look forward to in the coming months!

As alumni and special friends, you play an important part of our story not just in the past, but also as we lay the groundwork for the future. We value your prayers and support as we seek to boldly move forward our vision of offering a strong Christ-centered, Family-Focused, student-driven education that impacts our community and world. We continue to move forward to meet the needs and desires of our families. It has been amazing to watch the launch of Middle School, bringing back 7th grade this year and 8th grade next year. We are truly witnessing the impact of last year's Toddler classroom addition and our overall focus on Early Childhood. Adding Michelle Gerlach as Director of ECE and Family Life moves us to our next step in making sure that we remain committed to being a family-focused school and continuing to elevate our Early Childhood program. We have been blessed with some facility updates over this past year, including our new Panther Pavilion, converting the computer lab into the new 3rd grade classroom, and new flooring in the science lab to prepare it as a Full time middle school classroom.

As you read this update, we hope that you are as excited and encouraged by the work that God is doing at 1st Lutheran as we are! Thanks be to God!

Blessings,  
Samuel Fishburn, Principal



# Alumni Reunion & Decade Donation Challenge

We had a wonderful Alumni Reunion in September. It was so nice to have many of you in the building to hear your stories and walk down memory lane. Thank you so much for your contributions to our Decade Donation Challenge.

We have currently raised \$4,220 for new tables and chairs in our building. The 1970s are currently in the lead with \$2,470 of the donations coming for them. This fundraiser is still ongoing so help your decade win and help us raise the money needed for new tables and chairs in our classrooms.

To help us better plan for future alumni events, we are looking for people that would be interested in planning these events and/or helping us connect with classmates from your time at 1st Lutheran. If you have any interest, please email [info@1stlutheran.com](mailto:info@1stlutheran.com).

## LEA Conference

In October 2022, the teaching staff attended the National Lutheran Education Association conference held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This national conference is held every three years and brings together more than 3,000 Lutheran School educators.

We were grateful for the opportunity to attend the conference together in order to learn and fellowship together. Every staff member came home with new ideas that they are putting into action in their classroom.

Here are some reflections from some of our teachers:

The experiences spent in fellowship with our faculty members and fellow Lutheran school teachers and administrators and learning different methods to use in the classroom are so valuable. Thank you 1st Lutheran Families and church for allowing our staff to attend the LEA Convocation this year - it was a true gift from God!

- Mrs. Kimberly Ballard, 2nd Grade

LEA was a great time to rejuvenate my spirit and to be encouraged by all the church workers coming together with the mission of teaching our students and collaborating to further the kingdom of God. It was encouraging to get new ideas and reconnect with fellow teachers and friends from around the world.

- Mrs. Michelle Gerlach, Director of ECE and Family Life

LEA was a great time to connect with coworkers and learn from other Lutheran school teachers. I came back excited to put what I learned into action in my classroom.

- Mrs. Dawn Von Tersch, Resource Teacher



**STAY CONNECTED!!**

If you have changes to make to your address or you know of someone who did not receive a newsletter, please email Kristin Basham at [kbashame@1stlutheran.com](mailto:kbashame@1stlutheran.com). Help us reach out and connect with all alumni!



# Middle School Expansion Update



This year we see the first true year in our Middle School expansion by adding 7th grade and restructuring the rest of our program. Our middle school is considered 5th-8th grades. This year we added 7th grade and next year we will add 8th grade. This first year we have 20 students in our middle school, 5th-7th grades.

Our middle school program is led by Mrs. Rachel Merrill and Mrs. Heather Paulus as the core subject teachers; Mr. Fishburn teaches 7th grade math and Friday religion. We continue to have the LCMS Pastors help teach religion class on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursdays; Mrs. Davis continues to teach all of the middle school fine arts.



In addition to all of the standard core subjects and religion, our middle school students continue to take Spanish, choir, band, and art. In addition, we are offering quarter long (once per week) electives to expose students to a variety of topics. This first quarter, Mrs. Paulus is teaching an escape room elective, Mrs. Davis is teaching a pottery elective, Mr. Fishburn is teaching a Kitchen 101 elective, and Pastor is teaching an Introduction to Japanese elective. Other electives for this year include yearbook, set and costume design, fiber arts, world religions, gardening, and more!



Our goal is to ensure that students have a well-balanced exposure to different disciplines before they leave our school.

To start the school year, all of the middle school students with Mrs. Paulus, Mrs. Merrill, Pastor Merrill, and Mr. Fishburn went on a Leadership Retreat to Camp Lutherhoma. This was a great time of team bonding, fellowship, and establishing the direction and leadership expectations of our middle school students.

## 1st Lutheran Vision

*1st Lutheran School provides a Christ-centered, family-focused, student-driven education impacting our community and world.*

### 142 TOTAL STUDENTS

- 103 Families
- 37 / 142 (26%) of our students are new to campus

### 93 K-7TH STUDENTS

- Largest August K-7 (& K-6) enrollment since 2012
- 97% Retention rate
- Single grade classrooms K-4

### 49 ECE STUDENTS

- Waitlist for all classes
- 48% come from families new to our school

# Staff Updates

*We are excited to welcome the Gerlach's to the 1st Family!*



We rejoice that God has led the Gerlach Family to accept the Call to join us in ministry for this school year! Mr. Lucas Gerlach serves as our new 4th grade teacher and Mrs. Michelle Gerlach serves as Director of Early Childhood Education and Family Life for both church and school.

The Gerlach's teaching ministry has previously included time in Michigan, Colorado, Shanghai, China, and Wisconsin. Mr. Gerlach has primarily taught 2nd-4th grades, as well as a few years of K-12 Art. Mrs. Gerlach has primarily spent her time teaching in ECE-2nd grade and served part time in an ECE classroom and part time as Family Life Coordinator for their Wisconsin church and school.

Along with Lucas and Michelle, we welcome their 3 children! Josiah is 18 and is currently attending Concordia University in Chicago, Marissa is 16 and a sophomore at Southside and Cassie is in 7th grade here at 1st Lutheran.

We are thrilled to announce that God has led us to our next 3rd grade teacher in Mrs. Kerri Fowler-Whitson!

Kerri is not a stranger to the 1st Family! Kerri served on staff from January 2017 - May 2018 as 5th grade morning homeroom and 5th/6th afternoons during the last principal vacancy until Mrs. Nieting could return to the classroom full time. It was a sad day at that time that we did not have a full-time position on staff for Kerri to remain. Kerri always said that she hoped to one day be able to return as part of our staff when the timing was right for her family. We are so ecstatic that God has brought us back together in ministry.

*We are excited to welcome (back)*

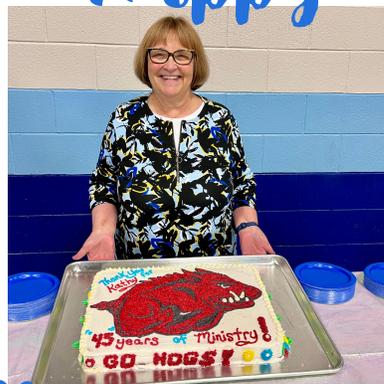
*Mrs. Kerri Fowler-Whitson*



3rd Grade Teacher  
2022-2023

Thank you to everyone that helped us celebrate Mrs. Nieting's 45 years of ministry to 1st Lutheran School and our church upon her retirement this past spring. Kathy has been a bedrock for our school community and accomplished something that few called workers do - serving in one location for their entire time in ministry. In her 45 years, Kathy has taught almost every grade level, served as interim principal 5 times, served on numerous committees and accreditation teams across the MidSouth District, and has helped fill numerous roles, needs, and behind the scenes tasks. Well done, good and faithful servant!

**Happy**



**Retirement!**

## Teacher Milestone



Mrs. Amy Jones  
3 year olds  
25 years of teaching  
6 years at 1st Lutheran

# Mark your Calendars...





## Panther Pavilion

Last Fall the Panther PTO (Parent Teacher Organization) set sights on building a shade structure on the playground. After researching different options and visiting with teachers, it was decided that building a pavilion that could be used as an outdoor classroom space best met the desired need.

Panther PTO raised over \$20,000 through fundraisers and special donations to see the project come to completion. Building occurred this summer. Special thanks to Lloyd Vaughn and Randy Coleman for leading this project and all of the other hands that helped!

## A Letter From Pastor

Dear Alumni and Friends,

In the seven years that I've now served as pastor of 1st Lutheran Church and School, I can honestly say that I've never been more excited by all that God has done and continues to do in our school!

Not only does God continue to bless us with an ever-increasing enrollment (just this past week, for example, we added another 5th grade student – and in the middle of the school year!), an ever expanding Middle School (where we were also blessed to be able to add an assortment of fun and challenging elective courses this year, including Introduction to Japanese and Comparative World Religions, both of which I'm teaching), and an excellent, creative, enthusiastic, staff (to which we were blessed this year to add Kerri Fowler-Whitson as 3rd Grade teacher, Lucas Gerlach as 4th Grade teacher, Michelle Gerlach as ECE Director, and Faith Nieting as Teacher's Aid; all of whom shine their Christian faith daily and brightly!), but we also continue to be blessed by the wise, humble, visionary leadership of Samuel Fishburn, and the tireless, positive, creative efforts of Kristin Basham: two huge gifts from God to our ministry, each in their own ways!



As pastor of 1st Lutheran Church and School, I am wholeheartedly committed to the ministry of this school and its success! I pray that you will continue to join me in this same commitment!

God's blessing to you all!  
Rev. John Merrill, Pastor

## 2022-23 Church Background Statistics (ECE-7th Grade)



37% of Families  
Non-Denominational



22% of Families  
No Listed Church Home



13% of Families  
Lutheran - LCMS



9% of Families  
Baptist