

# The EVANGEL

— The Inerrancy and Infallibility of Scripture Edition —





# From the Editor

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“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1).

These words are so simple, yet so powerful. We’ve heard the verse many times, yet to go back and read it again, wow. There was a beginning, and God was there. His power formed the world, and “it was very good” (Gen 1:31).

Welcome to the first *Evangel* of 2024. This year, we’re going back to the basics: being a Lutheran in the 21st century.

Sometimes we can throw words and phrases around, but what do they mean? In a recent Bible Study, the pastor asked the group: “What is the gospel?” Well, my goodness, I had to stop to think for a minute; I use the phrase regularly, but what is the definition? What do I mean when I say that?

It is edifying for all of us, perhaps especially for those of us who have been in the church for a while, to go back and study the basics again. Do we know what being Lutheran means? And why does it matter?

This edition starts us off at the beginning: Scripture. This is the foundation for all of it: our faith, our knowledge of God, and so much more.

Just like Genesis 1:1, going back to the beginning can be just what we need to equip us and encourage us for being a Lutheran in today’s world.

God’s peace be with you,

*Gretchen Baker*

Gretchen Baker  
The Editor

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# Scripture: OUR FOUNDATION

By Rev. Dr. Cary Larson

Recently, I had an opportunity to meet with bishops, presidents, and presiding pastors of confessional Lutheran churches from around the world in Wittenberg, Germany. At this conference, I learned that setting cultural differences aside, confessional Lutheran churches worldwide struggle with many of the same issues. One challenge that arose in our discussion was the disappointment when a stalwart confessional pastor suddenly changes his confession when a daughter wants to become a pastor or an adult child marries a Muslim or a non-believer. No doubt, due to the love of the adult child, the pastor rejects specific tenets of confessional Lutheranism, including the inerrancy and infallibility of God's holy Word.

In this new year of 2024, we will examine what it means to be a confessional and Apostolic Lutheran Christian in the 21st century. In the future issues of *The Evangel*, we will concentrate on specific teachings of our faith to appreciate that there is a Lutheran distinction. The objective is for members of our Association to be able to articulate clearly and concisely what we believe and confess, and why we stand firm on such a confession.

In the founding of The American Association of Lutheran Churches, the first item that quickly rose to the top was that this Association would stand boldly on the inerrancy and the infallibility of Holy Scripture. We take this confident stand because our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus, points to the dependability, reliability, perfection, and truthfulness of God's Holy Word (Matt

4:4; 5:17; Mark 12:24-27; Luke 4:21; 24:27, 44; John 5:39; 10:35; 17:17). We recognize that to take such an assertive stand today is not free from challenges. Regrettably, the majority of Americans who go by the label "Lutheran" will say that the Holy Scriptures are "inspired" and leave it at that.

We acknowledge that the Word of God is also inspired, but we don't stop there. Please note that confessing that the Holy Word of God is inspired, inerrant, and infallible is far different from saying that the Word of God is simply inspired.

When we say the Word of God is inspired, inerrant, and infallible, we confess that the Word of God has the last word in all matters of life and faith, or that God's Word is authoritative. It does not necessarily mean that we will fully comprehend the depth and width of the Word of God. A logical mind will never be able to explain how God spoke and created out of nothing. It defies logic and our personal experiences even to talk about the resurrection of all believers as presented in Holy Scripture. From our experiences, dead people stay dead. Therefore, to say the Word of God is inerrant and infallible is to say that we trust God and that what He says and reveals in His Word is true and sure, despite how we, in our finite minds, cannot understand how this is possible.

In contrast, saying that the Word of God is just inspired subjugates God's holy Word to human logic, reason, or even personal

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## Our Foundation continued...

experiences. To rest on the idea that the Word of God is only inspired will lead to error such as the Bible contains the Word of God. Today, some say with all sincerity, that the Word of God is inspired and yet denies the virgin birth, the sacrificial vicarious atonement, and even the bodily resurrection of our Lord, Christ Jesus. To say the Word of God is only inspired permits the defiant positions that abortion is good and a human right, or homosexuality, when expressed in committed love, is God-pleasing.

With this knowledge, we must remember that before we can talk about moral and ethical issues with a family member, friend, or another person, we must assess how this person views God's holy Word. Subscribing to the inerrancy and infallibility of Holy Scripture will make you sound like you are talking in an unknown language to the one who holds to the idea that the Word of God is only inspired, or if this individual believes that the Word of God is filled with moral stories, mythology, and dated information that no longer is relevant. Regrettably, it is possible that we will never have a productive discussion and we'll talk right past each other.

Despite the many challenges of sharing the certainty of God's inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word, we know this: God will never lie (Heb 6:18), that the church of Christ Jesus will prevail (Matt 16:18), that God's Word endures forever (1 Pet 1:25), that Christ Jesus saves (John 3:16-17), that through washing of regeneration we are a new creation (Titus 3:5), that in and through our baptisms we have been baptized into Christ Jesus, His death and His glorious resurrection (Rom 5:18-21), that all our sins have been washed away (1 John 1:7), that we stand righteous before a holy God because of Christ Jesus (Rom 5:1-11) and already possess the promise of eternal life with Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6), that no matter what happens in this world and in this time NOTHING can separate us from the love of God that we know through Christ Jesus (Rom 8:31-39), and finally, we are commissioned to share that Good News to all (Matt 28:18-20). This confession is not authenticated by reason, wishful thoughts, or experiences, but it is guaranteed to be true and certain (1 John 2:25) because it is stated clearly in the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God. Amen! †

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*With this knowledge, we must remember that before we can talk about moral and ethical issues with a family member, friend, or another person, we must assess how this person views God's holy Word.*





# Scripture

## The Authority of Scripture

By Rev. Greg Stenzel

In the early 1970s, as a teenager, I learned that the Bible is God's Word. There was a saying that was popular in Christian circles: "God said it. I believe it. That settles it." Very simple and straightforward. No messing around. Over time, however, attitudes began to change, and not for the good. Though I didn't understand it at the time, the battle for the Bible turned into a type of war where Christians began to argue about the reliability of Holy Scripture. Whatever happened to "God said it. I believe it. That settles it"?

So why is it that people have a hard time with, "God said it. I believe it. That settles it"? St. Paul shines a light: "For the Word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18). Moreover, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). That pretty well answers the question.

As Confessional Lutherans, we believe that the Bible is God's inerrant and infallible Word, in which He reveals His Law and His Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is the sole rule and norm for Christian faith, doctrine, and life. Luther and other Lutheran Reformers defend the inerrancy of Scripture with passion. How they defended inerrancy in their day gives us confidence today that we are teaching nothing new but stand on the shoulders of our forefathers in the faith when we confess the same.

Martin Luther wrote, "We know that God does not lie (Titus 1:2). I and my neighbor and, in short, all people, may err and deceive. But God's Word cannot err,"<sup>1</sup> which is Luther's testimony to the belief that the Scriptures are inerrant. The other reformers confessed this same truth: In the Preface to the Book of Concord, we read the confession of the Lutheran Church that God's Word

is "pure and unchangeable. We emphatically testify that after the pure and unchangeable truth of God's Word..."<sup>2</sup> And with crystal clarity, the writers of the Formula of Concord assert: "God's Word is not false or deceitful (Titus 1:1-3)." <sup>3</sup>

Just imagine the ramifications that denying the inerrancy of Scripture would have upon our faith. To deny it would mean that we cannot be sure that any word of the Bible is from God. There would always be doubt. In turn, this would mean that we would lose the sure comfort of Christ that the Bible so clearly teaches us, the sure comfort that He has exchanged His righteousness for our sin upon the cross and risen victorious over death and the grave so that we might live with Him forever; which is why we must continue to confess the inerrancy of Scripture like our Lutheran forefathers did.

As Lutherans, we believe, teach, and confess that the Bible is the ultimate authority in all matters of faith, doctrine, and life. And we sum up Scripture this way: it has one single, divine Author, which was the argument of the reformers and post-Reformation theologians. It was a common contention among them that the Holy Spirit was the author and interpreter of all of Scripture because "No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:21).

Only God can tell us what He wants us to believe and to do. "No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:11). Therefore, our knowledge of God and His will toward us, our understanding of the Christian faith and life, as well as the doctrine of what we believe, teach, and confess can be derived from no other source than from God's own Word. This Word of God is the norm according to which teachings and teachers will be judged. "If you remain in My word, you are really My

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## Authority of Scripture continued...

disciples. You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31, 32 EHV). And “If anyone speaks, let him do it as one speaking the messages of God” (1 Pet 4:11 EHV).

The Lutheran Confessions state:

“We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and norm according to which all teachings, together with all teachers, should be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testament alone. For it is written in Psalm 119:105, ‘Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.’ St. Paul has written, ‘even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.’”<sup>4</sup>

We live in an era, unfortunately, when every person’s thought or idea is given equal footing, and this happens when it pertains to God’s Word. I am amazed that sinful humanity thinks they can sit in judgment of God and over what He has said. “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” (1 Cor 1:12). Moreover, “We need to pay even more attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away” (Heb 2:1 EHV). We should take the words of Scripture in the sense and meaning they convey. We may not add to nor take away anything from it (Deut 4: 2), nor corrupt the Word of God by putting our spin into the text (2 Cor 2:17). We must not, therefore, adjust the Scriptures according to our ideas, or what is popular in the world today; instead, we must amend our thoughts and ideas according to Scripture. God wants His people to turn His way.

Christ Jesus accepted the entire Old Testament, and in the New Testament, He promised that the Holy Spirit would bring to the Apostles’ remembrance all the data related to His activities and ministry. And so, the Bible is not the product of the minds of brilliant human authors; it is the very revelation of the will of God.

The changes in the church have not come upon us suddenly. They result from forces that have been at work from the beginning. Remember, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12); “The devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8).



God wants His people to turn His way. His revelation to us and the world is Holy Scripture. There is nothing else we need because it thoroughly outlines God’s Law and Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. The message of “God said it. I believe it. That settles it,” remains as applicable today as it was 50 years ago. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). Therefore, the revelation of God is thoroughly practical, teaching us with Divine accuracy what to believe and how to live as individuals in this world today. It is the only infallible authority for all matters of faith and practice.

In conclusion, as you mine the articles in this edition of *The Evangel* and find you want to read and discover more, I would suggest “Doctrine Is Life: The Essays of Robert D. Preus on Scripture,” published by Concordia Publishing House. It is an excellent resource of articles and essays written by the late Dr. Preus and edited by his son and my former Pastor, Klemet Preus. †

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1 Paul Timothy McCain, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions: A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 429.

2 Ibid. 7.

3 Ibid. 489.

4 Ibid. 473.

# THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE

By Rev. Nigel Brown

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When Martin Luther stood before Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms in 1521, he famously said,  
“Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils,  
for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God.”<sup>1</sup>

The writings of the Lutheran reformers are saturated with references to the Holy Scriptures. The arguments made in the Lutheran confessions are based on the church’s historic teaching, the church fathers, and the Scriptures, with the Scriptures being the final authority. Their trust in the Bible as inerrant is evident by their reliance on it as the ultimate authority. Whether they used the word “inerrant” or not, their treatment of the Scriptures demonstrates that they believed the Bible is without error.

This view was reflected more expressly in the final document included in the Lutheran confessions, the Formula of Concord (1580). “We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and norm according to which all teachings, together with <all> teachers, should be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testament alone.”<sup>2</sup>

Lutherans also confess that the Biblical authors wrote under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit: “All Scripture is inspired by God.”<sup>3</sup> The confessions make that statement with reference to 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” Indeed, the reformers could not have substantiated their confessional writings if the Bible was not inerrant, and neither can we today accept the confessions if we reject the inerrancy of the Bible.

The Bible is the inerrant Word of God. Luther demonstrated in his life what it meant for the Bible to be inerrant. It meant that before kings and under threat of death, God’s Word must be upheld, for to do otherwise would be an assault against one’s conscience.

Today, Christians who confess the inerrancy of the Bible should go a step beyond that simple and important confession and ask of themselves, “What does this mean?” What are the practical implications of this confession? How does the

reality – that God has given us an authoritative, inerrant, and inspired Bible – affect our lives?

The answers to this question are myriad and I encourage you to ponder this question. To get you started, I will share a few of my own answers.

Since the Bible is inerrant, I don’t need to question whether God is in control, even when bombs are dropping and people are dying. Since the Bible is inerrant, I will not be confused about biological sex (“male and female he created them” Gen 1:27), even when I am called a bigot or worse. Since the Bible is inerrant, I will not be confused about the roles of men and women, the created order, obeying civil authorities, the duty of parents to discipline their children and bring them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord, the fact that leaders can be appointed by God and also hurtful and deceptive, and so many other facets of life in this fallen world that have worked confusion on a world that lacks answers apart from the Bible. Since the Bible is inerrant, I will seek life’s answers therein. “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:105).

Most importantly, since the Bible is inerrant, I can believe God’s words of consolation. I can receive forgiveness, even when I know I don’t deserve it. I can receive the very body and blood of Christ in the bread and cup, even though my senses cannot comprehend it. Though I don’t understand how Jesus is 100% man and 100% God, but on the basis of the Bible, I can believe it. Though I don’t understand how God could speak the universe into existence, let alone do it in six days, but on the basis of the Bible, I can know it to be true. On the basis of the Bible, I can know God and know that I am known by Him, loved by Him, and claimed by Him. Thanks be to God and His Holy Word! †

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<sup>1</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950), 473

<sup>2</sup> Paul Timothy McCain, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions: A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 473.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 604.



# Scripture



## The Clarity of Scripture

By Rev. Roger Twito

There are aspects of the Bible that are crystal clear, easily understood by those who read it with a humble heart, and there are aspects of the Bible that are less clear, and difficult to understand by those who read it.

Let's take for instance the idea of sin and salvation. As you read through the whole of Scripture it is quite clear that every person born into this world has a problem (sin) and God's the only one that can do something about it (salvation). How much clearer could you get regarding sin than Romans 3:23 ("For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God") and salvation than John 3:16 ("For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life")?

Here's another principle that the Bible is clear about. When we walk in God's ways, we can anticipate God's blessing, but when we wander from God's ways, we can anticipate brokenness and destruction. Sometimes God's blessing might be a bit disguised, but it's there, nonetheless. Jesus made it clear that He wanted us to experience life in all of its fullness. In John 10:10 we read, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Wandering from God's ways leads to futility, brokenness, and destruction. Prov. 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."

Here's another area that the Bible is clear about: Trusting the Lord produces peace, joy, and hope, while trusting in one's self produces disappointment and highs and lows directly contingent on circumstances. Prov. 3:5-6 is an encouragement: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." When your path is straight, your life has meaning and purpose. Trusting in yourself has disastrous results. Rev. 3:17 says, "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."

Just recently I was reading a quick bio on the life of author and apologist, Josh McDowell. As Josh recalled his days prior to experiencing God's forgiveness, new life, and eternal life, he said that although he had the appearance of being happy on the outside, on the inside he would feel good when things were going good and lousy when things were going lousy. What Josh learned in his conversion was to trust God with all of life and what it produced in him was a steady joy, an unexplainable peace, and an unshakable hope.

The list of issues that the Bible is clear about is extensive. The Ten Commandments don't seem overly ambiguous. The Sermon on the Mount is quite straightforward. Why would anyone be confused when it comes to the oft repeated themes of trusting and believing in God and loving our neighbor?

On the other hand, there are some areas that can be a bit confusing, if not, hotly contested by laymen and theologians alike. Take for instance Biblical prophecy. We know that Bible prophecy is best understood in hindsight, but that doesn't keep many from making bold, confident claims regarding the nuances of the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, Revelation, and many others. It is in this area that Scripture is less clear and we would be well-served to hold onto our convictions regarding what it says with a loose grip.

St. Paul in 1 Cor. 15 writes of that which he says is the most important. He writes of that which must be clear otherwise everything is fuzzy. He writes in verses 3-5, "For I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." It doesn't get any clearer than that. Because of and for our sins Christ died, He was buried, and on the third day He was raised from the dead so that we might have forgiveness, new life, and everlasting life. That's the clarity of the Bible we can stand on with absolute confidence. †

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Scripture:

# FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO



By Rev. Joe Christina

It is, perhaps, the one ecumenical hymn that binds all of the Body of Christ. I'm talking, of course, about "Jesus Loves Me." A simple tune with simple verses that many of us have memorized from our earliest Sunday School days. We will often sing it as a closing hymn on Sunday mornings, and the nave always seems just a bit louder when we do. Lambs and sheep alike blend their voices to praise the God who saves us from our sins. And how do we know? "For the Bible tells us so."

This simple song whose words were penned by Miss Anna Warner is a wonderful testimony to the inerrancy of Holy Scripture. Jesus loves me. How do I know this? Because God's revealed Word simply can not lie to me.

Right there in the garden with the juice of the forbidden fruit still on Adam's chin, God, Who announces the curses of sin, also announces the One who would crush the head of this morbid serpent. This, of course, is the Jesus who loves me. David would speak of the suffering of God's chosen servant in Psalm 22, and Isaiah would speak of the same in chapter 53. This too is the Jesus who loves me. Micah would tell us where this Jesus who loves me was to be born: in the town of Bethlehem (5:2). And then the inspired gospel composers would flesh out for us the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of this very Jesus who loves me. For the Bible tells me so indeed.

I will often times remark to people that I don't get paid enough to lie. My entire career is based off of the inerrancy of the 66 books of the Word of God. I am tasked with conveying the message of God's truth in those pages to those under my pastoral care. My pulpit prayer is that God would make me a pane of glass so that my flock can see through me to what our Lord has to say in His "without error" Word. And a large portion of my week is studying what the Bible tells me so that in turn I can convey to my flock what the Bible tells them as well. Ask a baptized lamb if Jesus died for him or her. The response is always an immediate "yep." Then ask yourself where a lamb like that got their intel from. For the Bible tells me so.

Christ bids us to accept the kingdom of God like little children. In other words, if God declares it, it must simply be so. The pages of inerrant Scripture can all be summed up in those three simple words: Jesus Loves Me. And like little ones sitting on the carpet stabbing their juice boxes and singing along to Miss Warner's beloved hymn, we too can join our voices with theirs praising the Jesus Who does, in fact, love us. For the Bible tells us so.

And after all: God can't lie. †

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# INERRANT AND INFALLIBLE

## The Lutheran Understanding

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By Rev. Phillip Hofinga

“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe” (1 Thes 2:13 NIV 1984).

The conviction that the Holy Bible is inspired by God traces back to the Apostles and the early Church. Most of us are familiar with 2 Timothy 3:16, which begins, “All Scripture is *inspired* by God...” and we have probably all noticed that the word *inspired*, in common parlance today, doesn’t carry the same weight with which we know St. Paul meant it in that context. The meaning of the word has been whittled down, so that any one of us might “feel inspired” by any given whim and say that we, too, are “inspired.” So the NIV (1984) attempted to rectify this with the following translation: “All Scripture is *God-breathed*...” If we think about it, this translation really gets at what St. Paul is saying: Scripture is the Word of God.

St. Augustine, who lived at the end of the 4th and beginning of the 5th centuries, was convinced that the authors of Scripture were completely free from error. This same conviction was taken up by Luther and the Lutheran Fathers as well, and echoed in the Swiss Reformation, at least in principle. Luther, who was fundamentally a scholar of the Bible, was aware of many of the “higher” critical issues that would, long after his death, eventually consume the field of academic biblical scholarship. His attitude toward the critical questions that arose from deep study of the text was, however, one of humble submission. If it appeared to Luther that the Word of God was in any way in error, then the problem lay with Luther, and not the Word of God.



It is this attitude of humble submission to the written Word of God that is reflected in article 1 of the Epitome of the Formula of Concord: “We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the *only rule and norm* according to which *all* doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged...”<sup>1</sup>

But wait...what about *inerrancy* and *infallibility*? How do *rule and norm* translate into *inerrant and infallible*? Although each of these terms in one form or another has been used to describe the Bible throughout Christian history, these terms were not used in the confessions of the 16th century the way they are in the TAALC confession of faith today. They came into confessional use as a result of attacks on the reliability of the Scriptures that came from the school of “higher criticism,” a pretentious “scientific” approach to Scripture that promised to find the real Word within the word; to sort out, as it were, the wheat from the chaff of the words of the Bible. By the end of the 19th century, this had become the standard way of teaching the Bible in the universities in Europe, and was rapidly growing in popularity in the United States as well.

In both Reformed and Lutheran circles, this necessitated a refinement of our language with respect to the Bible. The words “rule” and “norm,” like the word “inspired” had developed diminished meanings in the broader culture. Both had taken on the connotation of “usual,” as in the expressions “as a rule” or “normally.” And we all know that those expressions denote things that are “usual,” but not hard and fast.

In contrast, the terms as used in our Formula of Concord denote the highest standard, above which there is no standard. This has been expressed as *norma normans*, that is, the norm of norms, or the standard of standards. What this means is, there is nothing higher than Scripture by which we can measure the truth of Scripture – *nothing*. Not human reason. No set of “facts.” No “empirical evidence.” The “higher critical” scholars, however well intended they might have been, were asserting that human reason and “scientific” endeavor ought to be thought of as a higher standard by which we should judge Scripture and its pronouncements. The departure of “higher critical” scholarship from the Lutheran Confessions could not be more pronounced or more dramatic. Effectively, such “scholarship” had reduced the Word of God to the word of men.

It is in response to this that we began to clarify and articulate the intentions of the Lutheran confessors in terms of the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture in the confessions of faith of our congregations and larger church bodies. The fact that in the fundamentalist movement of the early 20th century, many Reformed churches took the same step gives us an opportunity to reflect on what this confession does and does not mean for us who are Lutherans.

When we confess that the Scriptures are inerrant and infallible, we are confessing that the *Word of God* is inerrant and infallible.

The Scriptures are inerrant and infallible *because they are* the Word of God; the Scriptures are *not* the Word of God because *we*, by our reason and assessment, have *deemed* them inerrant and infallible. Please read that sentence again, because the distinction is of the utmost importance. That the Bible is inerrant and infallible is a confession of faith in the Word of God, *not* in our human ability to rationally or empirically assess the accuracy or truth of its subject matter.

The latter assumption is often at work in the endeavor to reconcile all the apparent “contradictions” of the Bible, or to reconcile Genesis 1 and 2 with the fossil “record” and “scientific” pronouncements. And so these endeavors often exactly reflect the error that there is a standard *above* Scripture against which it can be measured and, hopefully, not be found wanting. This error is enticing and seductive precisely and especially because of the belief in our time that our human capacity for reason and knowledge is endless and supreme. Yet a quick, common-sense look around the world should tell us that the human capacity for reason and knowledge are not only *not* endless and supreme, but deeply flawed and broken. And so the challenges that the unbelieving world, or even well-intended (but misguided) scholars, may bring to the Bible need not consume us, because God has spoken and is speaking to us! We confess *God’s Word!*

Questions may arise about translation and transmission of the texts of the Bible. But these questions are best addressed as arising from the deficiency of our understanding, both individually and collectively, not as though from the deficiency of the Bible itself. And for this reason, we are not free to simply detach ourselves (as the Church) from the ongoing tasks of translation and transmission, which themselves are tasks of *faithfulness*. Nor should any of us, be we novices or scholars, imagine ourselves, by way of some individual quest, at liberty to step outside of the posture of humble submission to the inerrant, infallible Word of God which is the *sole* rule and norm.

At the same time, we cannot simply detach ourselves from the confessors who have gone before us in some hubristic illusion that we are somehow smarter than they were, or that the corpus of human knowledge of the world has outgrown them.

Ours, rather, is the task of carrying on the good confession, and that means, as St. Paul tells the Christians at Thessalonica, that we receive the Word of God, not as the word of men, “but as it *actually is*, the *word of God*, which is at work in you who believe” (2 Thes 2:13). And that Word does not err and it does not fail. Glory be to God! †

*The Rev. Phillip Hofinga serves the congregations of Grace Lutheran Church, Nunda, SD, and Lake Madison Lutheran Church, Rutland, SD.*

<sup>1</sup> Paul Timothy McCain, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions: A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 473.





# Pastors' Conference



## Pastors' Conference held in St. Paul

By Rev. Dave Spotts

It's easy for us to think about people who do heroic things in life: soldiers, doctors, law enforcement officers, firefighters, and the like. Many of them lay down their lives and their preferences on a daily basis so as to bring help and comfort to others. They deserve respect, care, and times of refreshment and recovery.

There's another group of people, mostly people we would classify as unsung heroes. Our pastors lay down their lives and their preferences on a daily basis to care for us. The work I observe people doing in local parishes in The AALC and in other church bodies is incredibly demanding. Christ's servants labor tirelessly, or maybe not so tirelessly.

Every year, around the end of October, the ministerium of The AALC gathers for a conference. It's a time of refreshment and recovery for these men, many of whom are quite tired. We gather around God's Word and Sacrament, receiving the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation from our fellow servants in Christ. This is a priceless, and also surprisingly affordable, conference.

This year's conference, held at Calvary Lutheran Church in Saint Paul, MN, featured keynote speaker Rev. Dr. Alfonso Espinosa, pastor of Saint Paul's Lutheran Church in Irvine, CA. His latest book, *Faith that Shines in the Culture* (Concordia Publishing House, 2023), speaks to the integral relationship that Christianity can have to our current culture. Among their other vocations, God's people are to serve as salt and light in the world, preserving it, flavoring it, and

guiding it in the way it should go. This is an enormous challenge, as we are in a world of darkness, under the curse of sin.

Dr. Espinosa challenged our ministerium to engage the surrounding culture. We can do this without fear, as we are walking with Christ our Savior who guides us in His paths of righteousness (Psalm 23:3). Even when we care for those who are troubled by unimaginable sin, hardship, and even the day of death, we know Christ the Lord is present as the victorious Lord of all. What's more, we know He loves our world (John 3:16) and has given Himself to draw all to Him for their forgiveness (John 12:32).

In addition to hearing words of hope and comfort from Dr. Espinosa, we were graced by numerous devotionals, evening divine services, and presentations, including an update from our American Lutheran Theological Seminary leaders, our Presiding Pastor, and the presentation of two papers, one regarding women in the pastoral office and one regarding the nature of sanctification. We also had many opportunities for fellowship, not only among pastors, but also building deeper relationships with a number of our seminary students and several people who were interviewing with the Clergy Commission. A few others were also visiting with us to get to know The AALC better.

Is this a challenging event? It sure is! Many of the participants are busy visiting, studying, and praying with one another from early morning until late at night. Is it good? You bet! Psalm 133, one of the Psalms of Ascent, says (NKJV),

*continued on page 13*





## Conference continued...

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is  
 For brethren to dwell together in unity!  
 It is like the precious oil upon the head,  
 Running down on the beard,  
 The beard of Aaron,  
 Running down on the edge of his garments.  
 It is like the dew of Hermon,  
 Descending upon the mountains of Zion;  
 For there the LORD commanded the blessing –  
 Life forevermore.”

A Psalm of Ascent would be used by people climbing up to Jerusalem, an arduous journey. They would become hot and tired, and would suffer all the challenges hiking up a mountain. But in the end, they would be able to come together. The presence of God was there for them, like the oil which symbolizes the Holy Spirit. It is poured out in abundance, running down from the head and beard, onto the clothes. God’s presence is refreshing, like cool dew on a fresh morning.

In the Pastors’ Conference, God gives His servants, our pastors, an opportunity to receive refreshment and recovery from the trials they face caring for us day after day and week after week. It is a precious gift! They return to their congregations knowing the blessings of God better than before. Thanks be to God for this opportunity. †

*The Rev. Dave Spotts serves as the missionary chaplain for Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry, bringing face to face pastoral care to the students, faculty, staff, and administrators of colleges in Columbia Missouri. He also teaches several courses for the American Lutheran Theological Seminary.*



*Previous Page - Left: Calvary Ev. Lutheran Church, St. Paul, MN, hosted the Pastors’ Conference. Right: Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins introduces the seminarians.*

*Upper left: Rev. Dr. Alfonso Espinosa was the keynote speaker. Photo by The Rev. Chris Rosebrough*

*Top: Rev. Dr. Cary Larson, Rev. Joe Dapelo, Rev. Jon Holst, and Vicar John Linch.*

*Above and below: seminarians and clergy enjoy the fellowship. Submitted photos.*





**Left:** Rev. Mike Badenhop, Rev. Matthew Fenn, and Rev. Dr. Duane Lindberg with their cake for Pastor Appreciation Sunday in October 2023.

**Middle:** Rev. Dr. Duane Lindberg with his daughter, Martha Stone, and wife, Mardell, and the quilt made for him.

**Right:** Rev. Matthew Fenn with his wife, Laurin, and their family. Submitted photos.

# Pastor Appreciation Day Held at Ascension Lutheran, Waterloo

By Kathy Schuhmacher

Pastor Appreciation Month is a special time that congregations set aside each year to honor their pastors for the hard work, sacrificial dedication, and multiple blessings provided by these special people. This year's Pastor Appreciation Sunday was on October 11, 2023.

It is important to remember that appreciation, affirmation, and prayer support for our spiritual leaders is important and appropriate throughout the entire year. There are many ways to show this appreciation, and this time, the Ascension congregation worked through their own quilting group, Threads of Love. A quilt was designed and created especially for each Pastor.

After Sunday morning's services, our event began with a short program. It was noted that God has entrusted to clergy one of the most precious of assignments: the spiritual well-being of His flock. The following two verses were lifted up from God's Word:

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Tim 5:17).

"Respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work" (1 Thes 5:12-13).

It was also noted that Martin Luther had some words for us to ponder. He said, "When God wants to speak and deal with us, he does not avail himself of an angel but of parents or the pastor or of our neighbor."<sup>1</sup>

The quilts given to the Pastors showcased an embroidered Luther's Rose block surrounded by traditional Bible block patterns called "Children of Israel," "Glad Tidings," and "Bright Morning Star."

One of the quilts was stitched in a Norwegian "Fair Isle" pattern showcasing "Norwegian Flower" blocks. (Guess which pastor was the recipient of this quilt!) The quilts were wrapped around the shoulders of each pastor in a mantle of love, as we clapped to show how very much these Pastors are loved and appreciated!

We also extended our love to our pastors' wives, as an acknowledgement of their important roles in giving support to their husbands and the congregation. Mardell Lindberg, Christine Badenhop, and Laurin Fenn were each presented with a prayer plant that represented the many prayers lifted up for them and their families by our congregation. (Their children were encouraged to watch how the leaves on the plant stay flat during the daytime and fold together in the evening like praying hands!)

The following prayer was prayed for our pastors and families during our program and is printed below as a model for others to use in praying for their pastors. Do lift up your pastors in prayer regularly! †

Almighty God, Who by Your Son Jesus Christ, gave to these, your servants, many excellent gifts and who commanded them faithfully to love, care, and to feed Your flock, we ask You to bless these dear pastors who diligently preach Your holy Word, who reach out to those who need Your tender care, and who teach Your truths to young and old alike. Wrap them in your tender and loving care just as we have wrapped the quilts around each one. Bless their work among us, and give them the strength to do Your will. Bless their wives and families who support them. We are so thankful to you for giving Ascension the gifts of their ministry. Help us to continue to show our support to them in whatever way we can. Amen.

*Kathy Schuhmacher is a member of Ascension Lutheran Church, Waterloo, IA.*

<sup>1</sup> Luther, Martin, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 22: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 527.



# Women of L.I.F.E.

## The Inerrancy of Scripture: *A Layman's Perspective*

By Barbara Ruuska

I remember courtroom scenes in old movies that commonly portrayed witnesses swearing an oath with one hand on the Bible saying, "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God." Presumably, their courtroom testimony would thereby be entirely true, just as the Bible was entirely true. In today's culture this practice has been abolished, as the belief in the truth of the Bible continues to erode.

Inerrancy is not a word I use in my daily life. I always have to look words up to get a better understanding of their meaning. "Inerrancy is a noun meaning free from error."<sup>1</sup> In other words, "truthfulness."

When a Bible was used for swearing in witnesses, it wasn't opened to a specific page. The witness swore upon the whole Bible—cover to cover. The Bible is the source and basis of the truth.

To learn what the truth is, we have to read the Bible. The original text is foreign to most of us, and we need to rely on a translation. I've noticed that some translations may be slightly difficult to read, while still being faithful to the text of the original languages. Others are very easy to read, but are not really translations but rather the translator's opinions and include other cultural agendas meant to erode the order of God's creation. In other words, "errant." If you are unsure about which Bible translation to use, ask your pastor. He can tell you which translations you can trust and which ones to avoid.

Today's culture is increasingly fragmented. Not only are generations separated, but entire subcultures continue to emerge based on social media micro interests, making it more and more difficult for people to make connections. When a congregation settles on a common Bible translation to use, it provides an opportunity to build a common culture within the family and within the church by

using the same translation for studying or memorizing Bible verses, regardless of generational ages or subcultures.

The Bible is a huge book. It might be the longest book that any of us has ever read. Don't be discouraged. Within it are sixty-six books and each one teaches us the truth. The Old Testament is the family history and prophecy of the coming Messiah (Christ). The New Testament is the life, death and resurrection of Christ and the formation of Christ's bride, the Church. Find a friend (or spouse) and start with small sections and before you know it, you'll have read through it more than once. Don't forget to go to your pastor's weekly Bible study to learn even more about the truth!

I have noticed that another source of error is unbelief. Some believe only parts of the Bible; they pick and choose what they want to believe as the truth. Some church bodies believe that the Bible is not God's Word, but rather it merely contains God's Word. They like to invent creative ways to discredit the authorship and criticize many of the writings in the Old and the New Testaments to justify their unbelief of the truth.

I take comfort in knowing that The AALC believes: "The Bible alone is the source of our theology and doctrine. We believe that the Holy Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God. It is the indisputable authority and rule in all faith and life. The Holy Bible has greater authority than our feelings, our understanding, our culture, or our comforts. Simply stated, it is God's Word."<sup>2</sup>

As a forgiven sinner, I recognize that only the whole truth and nothing but the truth has set me free. †

*Barbara Ruuska and her husband Brian worship with the saints at Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church in St. Paul, MN.*

<sup>1</sup> *Random House College Dictionary*, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1979), 681.

<sup>2</sup> "Who is the AALC?" The American Association of Lutheran Churches, <https://www.taalc.org/who-is-the-aalc>, accessed November 29, 2023.



# Church News



## Rev. Richard Shields Receives Doctorate

By Rev. Jerry Storrs

During worship on October 1, 2023, with Shepherd of the Mountain Lutheran Church in Frazier Park, CA, The Rev. Richard Shields was awarded a Doctor of Divinity Degree from our American Lutheran Theological Seminary (ALTS). Western Regional Pastor Jerry Storrs led the Service of the Word for our brothers and sisters of “Shepherd” and Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, ALTS Professor of Theology, celebrated the Sacrament of the Altar for all in attendance. Immediately after delivering the message, time was given for Rev. Dr. Leins to offer a synopsis of Rev. Richard Shields dedicated service as the President of ALTS from 2007 until 2018, when he entered emeritus status.

In 2007 as Pastor Shields began his time serving as President of ALTS, the seminary moved from Minnesota to Ft Wayne, IN. As technology became more robust, on-line classes were offered, and our seminary’s curriculum added a Master of Theological Studies (MTS) degree to her catalog which became a trend-setting on-line course of study. In addition to the MTS, during President Shields’ tenure, ALTS added a Master of Arts in Religion (MAR) degree to enable lay men and women of the church to grow in their understanding of our Lord’s promise and provision.

During his time teaching and leading our seminary into this new age of education and since his retirement, Rev. Shields’ influence remains on students who attended our school and especially those who have been awarded Master of Divinity (M.Div) degrees and

serve the pulpits of Lutheran congregations. Many students have been impacted by the vision, dedication, and leadership of The Reverend Richard Shields.

During his time as President, Professor, and “Seelsorger” (soul care-giver) to the students of our American Lutheran Theological Seminary, the personal attention, administrative leadership, and life-transforming knowledge-gifting are immeasurable. For these reasons our TAALC’s Commission for Higher Education, in concert with the Faculty and Staff of ALTS voted unanimously to confer on The Reverend Richard P. Shields, President Emeritus of ALTS, the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

It has been my humble honor to know, worship, pray, and serve with Rev. Dr. Shields, so it was my genuine honor, as Western Regional Pastor, to be asked to read his award to him as I placed it into his deserving hands. God bless you, Brother Rich, I know there are many dedicated Lutheran pastors out there who have benefited from your work in the Kingdom of God. God’s blessings to you in your retirement! †

*The Rev. Jerry Storrs serves Sonland Lutheran Church in Casa Grande, AZ.*

**Top Left:** The Rev. Richard P. Shields, President Emeritus of ALTS, was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity by ALTS, after serving the seminary since 2007.

**Top Right:** Rev. Jerry Storrs, Rev. Dr. Richard Shields, and Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, during the service on October 1, 2023, at Shepherd of the Mountain Lutheran Church, Frazier Park, CA. Submitted photos



## Rev. Hoffeld Retires After 56 Years in Ministry



**Top Left:** Rev. Hoffeld's ordination photo. **Bottom Left:** Rev. Norman Hoffeld shared reflections from his years of service. **Right:** Rev. Norm and his wife NoEl. Submitted photos.

Sunday, September 10, 2023, was Rev. Norman Hoffeld's last service before his retirement, after serving for 56 years, including 24 years at Bible Lutheran Church, Dodge Center, MN.

On September 10th, the church held a special service. David Hoffeld spoke, and Pastor Hoffeld reflected on his years of service to the Lord. Althea Rood blessed us with her saxophone, and she and Pastor Dale Rood led us in worship.

We also celebrated communion together. After the service, we had a lovely fellowship meal. †

*“Respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work” (1 Thes 5:12-13).*

1. Eastern Region of The AALC
2. Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins
3. Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche (SELK)
4. Shanda Knight, Commissioned Church Worker
5. Lutherans For Life
6. Our Savior Lutheran Church, Piqua, OH
7. Nathan Rinne
8. The Persecuted Church
9. Dan Kruger, Treasurer of The AALC
10. Pilot Knob Lutheran Church, Forest City, IA
11. Unity in the Church
12. Rev. Dr. Daniel Schroeder
13. To be refreshed by weekly liturgy
14. Regional Pastors
15. Christ the King Lutheran Church, Chesterfield, MI
16. For prospective Seminary Students
17. Rev. Dan Sollie
18. For all to know Scripture is breathed out by God
19. Rev. Roger Twito, Assistant Presiding Pastor
20. Local AALC church
21. Rev. Gregory Stenzel
22. Pastors' Wives
23. Clam Falls Lutheran, Church Frederic, WI
24. Not to be led astray from God's Word
25. Rev. Jerry Storrs
26. All affected by Covid-19
27. All would believe in Sola Scriptura/ Scripture Alone
28. Rev. Fred Balke
29. For churches without pastors
30. For congregations to know God's Word
31. Rev. Benjamin Baker



# February 2024

## PRAYER BOOKMARK

1. Rev. Nigel Brown
2. American Lutheran Theological Seminary
3. Christ the Ray of Hope Lutheran Church, Albuquerque, NM
4. All would believe in the Infallibility and Inerrancy of Scripture
5. Rev. Daniel Cloeter
6. International Lutheran Council
7. Agency for Professional Chaplains
8. Local Community
9. Rev. Tylan Dalyrmpfle
10. Christus Victor Ev. Lutheran Church, Fayetteville, NC
11. Our Nation's Leaders
12. Rev. Loyd Ginn
13. Pr. Oliver Urdahl
14. Association Council
15. Rev. John Anderson
16. Community Lutheran Church, Wausaukee, WI
17. Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
18. Rev. Dr. James Hoefer
19. That our churches do not drift away from Holy Scripture
20. Rev. Joseph Christina, National Home Mission Developer
21. Rev. Michael Holsten
22. Rev. Gary Benson
23. That God would raise up Church Workers
24. Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Bremerton, WA
25. Rev. David F. Johnson
26. For all Seminary Students
27. Tartu Academy of Theology
28. Rev. Morris Kirchof
29. St. Paul Lutheran Congregation, Tripoli, IA

# Fall Men's Recharge Held at Ascension – Waterloo

By Tom Knight



Men gather for the fall men's event at Ascension Lutheran, Waterloo, IA.

On September 23, 2023, a group of men from all over NE Iowa gathered together for the 2023 Fall Men's Recharge at Ascension Lutheran Church in Waterloo, IA.

Our theme for this year's conference was "Holding the High Ground" (Ephesians 6:13). This event provided a great opportunity for fellowship, worship, and studying of God's Word.

We were blessed by three engaging speakers who gave scriptural presentations on some topics relating to "Holding the High Ground" in our walk with God. They covered topics such as "Holding the High Ground with the Word of God" by Randy Costello, "Holding the High Ground in our relationships" by David DeZur, and "Holding the High Ground in the Face of Adversity" by Tom Knight.

At the conclusion of this event, we hosted a panel discussion where four men fielded questions from the attendees. We were also blessed by a fantastic kitchen team who provided a delicious lunch and several snacks. Our worship leader did a great job of leading us during the morning and afternoon worship sessions. A huge "Thank You" goes out to all of the outstanding volunteers who worked so hard to make this event a success.

Want to hear more about this exciting event? Please reach out to one of our team and we would be happy to share more! †

*Tom Knight is the Director of Men's Ministry at Ascension Lutheran Church, Waterloo, IA.*



# Evangelism Team

## SHARING LOVE AT LOCAL SCHOOL

By Carolyn Lofald

The Evangelism Committee from Christ Lutheran Church, Duluth, MN, has been reaching out in a variety of ways. We are blessed to have Piedmont Elementary School directly across the street from our church. On occasion, we send messages to them on our electronic sign. This school year, we scrolled “Welcome Back Students & Staff” with a school bus popping in that made it fun!

One year we made quilted baskets for the teachers and filled them with classroom items. We delivered those in person and prayed over the teachers before school started. We have purchased treats for their teacher’s classrooms, so their students that don’t have a snack will have one. We’ve bought donuts for the staff.

This year, at the end of the first full week of school, we brought over rolls, muffins and coffee for the staff. We made up a “Welcome Back” sign with a prayer and Bible verses and placed it on the table where they picked up their treats. We also prepared gifts for each of the teachers and staff and placed them next to the goodies – a little card which read “We just hapPEN to think that you are INKredible!” with our church pen attached. We had a prayer on the back of each card, one for the teachers and the other for the staff.

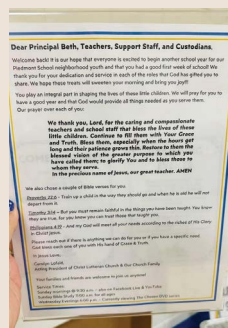
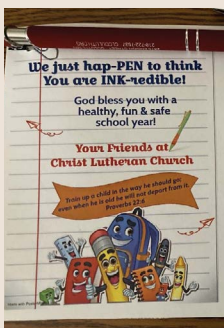
The school uses our soccer field behind the church for their school activities, and a few of us have volunteered to assist with that.

On Bike Safety Day, we donated a bike that was awarded to a student that had shown kindness to others. Our church is also their designated emergency evacuation site.

Our Esther Circle sponsors a hat and mitten drive for their students each fall, and we encourage our congregation to start knitting and crocheting and/or bring store bought items. We have placed those items on a tree in our Narthex, or we string up all the hats and mittens on a colorful rope in our Fellowship Hall to display. We try to deliver those items before their Christmas break.

It is our hope to try and schedule an afterschool activity one day a week in the future. We are blessed to have the support from our church family and thankful that we are able to continue our activities and bless others, as we wait patiently for our new Shepherd. It’s all in God’s hands. †

Carolyn Lofald is a member of Christ Lutheran Church, Duluth, MN.



**Top:** The neighboring school uses the church’s soccer field, and several church members volunteer with those activities. **Bottom:** The Evangelism Committee purchased treats for teachers, staff, and students on various occasions, as well as providing note cards with prayers and pens with the church logo on them. Submitted photos.

Winter Gear tree: Each fall, the Esther Circle holds a hat and mitten drive for students at the school. Members can handmade the winter gear, or donate purchased items. Submitted photo.

## The American Association of Lutheran Churches

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### UPCOMING EDITIONS...

Please be in prayer for and consider contributing to these upcoming editions.

**2024 Overarching theme: What Does It Mean To Be a Lutheran in The 21st Century?**

Mar/Apr: The Lutheran Confessions (*deadline Jan. 15*)

May/June: The Lutheran Distinction (*deadline Mar. 1*)

Jul/Aug: Lutheran Worship (*deadline May 1*)

Sept/Oct: Convention Edition (*deadline July 1*)

Nov/Dec: The Lutheran Home (*deadline Sept. 1*)

#### Church News:

*The Evangel* welcomes submissions of what's happening in your congregation. To submit content, **email the editor** Gretchen Baker: [theevangel@taalc.org](mailto:theevangel@taalc.org)

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