

The

# EVANGEL

Baptism





# From the Editor

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Have you ever been caught off guard by someone's question about baptism? After chatting with an acquaintance about gardens, kids, or summer plans, they suddenly throw out: "What's the deal with Lutherans and baptism?" If you are anything like me, your typical response is a very eloquent: "Umm..."

This brings up a wonderful use for this month's theme on baptism. First, I hope you read for your own encouragement. Then, how about giving your copy to one of those inquisitive neighbors or family members or even someone in your own congregation, who has raised a question or two about this mystery we Lutherans hold dear.

I've heard from a few individuals around our association who share copies with those outside the Lutheran circle, resulting in good discussions and edification in the faith.

I'm sure your church might have some extra copies lying around, so go ahead and grab a few and even mail a copy with a note to someone who might benefit from a study on this gift of God.

Perhaps with a bit of a refresher, we can learn how to respond a bit more like my pastor husband. When an out-of-the-blue question comes his way, he picks up his coffee mug, leans back in his chair, and asks: "What do you mean by your question?"

It is quite the scene to witness, and it brings me joy every time.

God's peace be with you,

*Gretchen Baker*

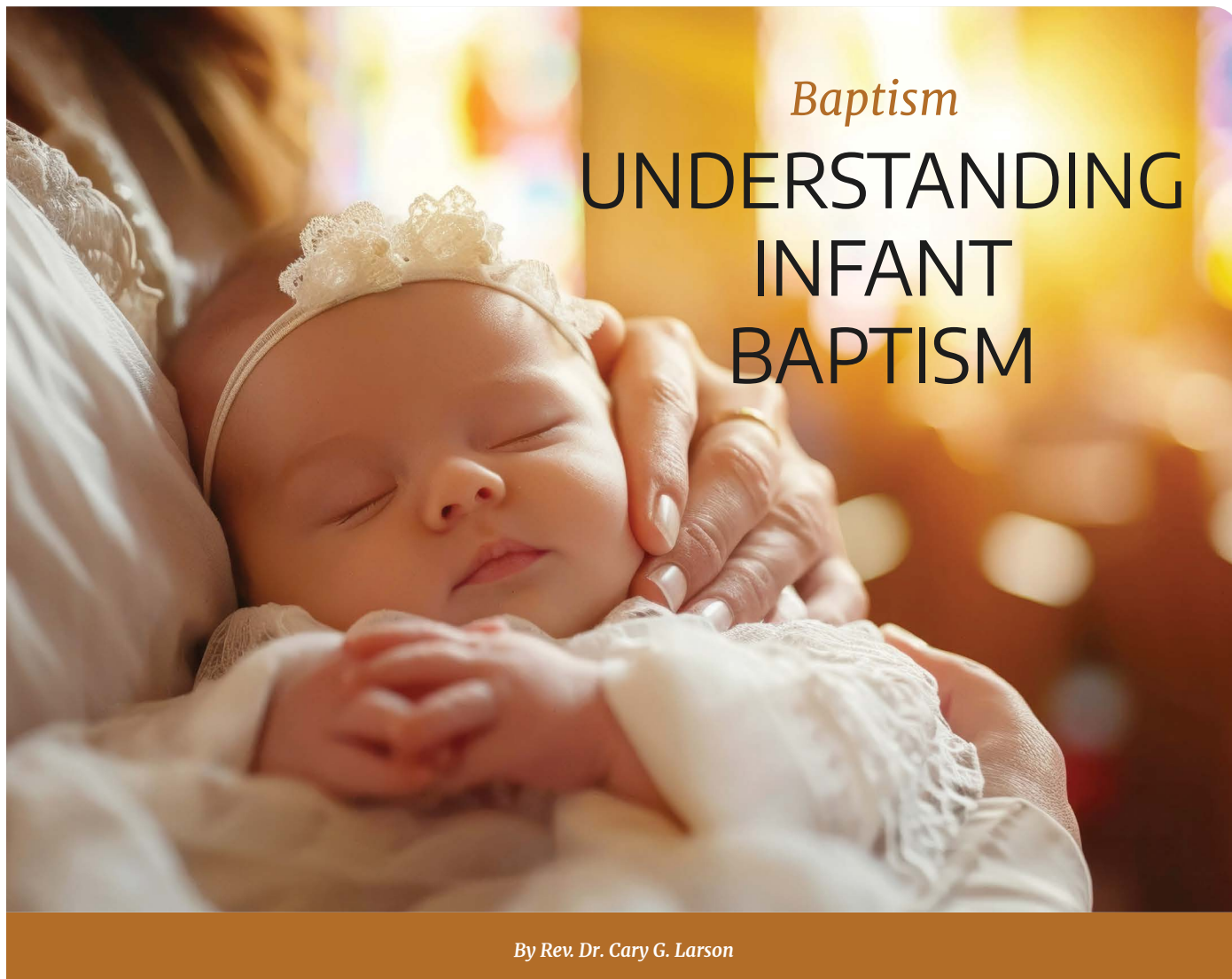
Gretchen Baker  
The Editor

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# Baptism

## UNDERSTANDING INFANT BAPTISM

By Rev. Dr. Cary G. Larson

*“And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it’ And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them” (Mark 10:13–16).*

The topic of infant baptism can sometimes bring up questions and discussions and regrettably has caused serious controversy within Christ’s Church. Why do we baptize babies who can’t yet understand faith? Is it really valid? In the *Large Catechism* within the *Book of Concord*, Martin Luther provides a sincere and clear explanation of this practice of baptizing infants.

At the heart of the *Large Catechism*, Luther informs us that infant baptism delights God because it aligns with His command and promises. Baptism is more than a nice ritual we follow; it’s a special moment where God’s Word meets water, where the Holy Spirit creates a saving faith, regardless of the age of the one baptized.

One common question is whether infants can truly believe, given that they can’t yet express their faith. The *Large Catechism* addresses this concern directly, explaining that the power of baptism doesn’t depend on the person’s faith, but rather on God’s Word. Think of baptism like a special gift from God where its significance comes from His promise, not our ability to understand it. Luther uses a helpful analogy: even if someone approaches the Lord’s Supper unworthily, it’s still a true sacrament. In the same way, if baptism is performed with God’s Word and water, it is genuine, regardless of how the person baptized can express his or her faith or feelings. This is especially comforting for parents who wonder about their child’s faith because it is really about what God is doing, not just what their child can comprehend.

Luther also highlights what baptism really signifies: a life of letting go of sin and embracing a new life in Christ Jesus. When a baby is baptized, we witness the death of an enemy of God and the birth of a redeemed child of God (Rom 8:6–7). This is not about a single event but a life of being grafted unto Christ Jesus! As we grow in faith, we’re called to keep fighting against sin and temptation and allow Christ’s grace to shape us. Infant baptism

*continued on page 4*

## Infant Baptism continued...

is the starting line for this sanctified life, welcoming the child into a life where the Holy Spirit can transform the child as he or she grows in Christ Jesus and in years. The parents and the church community play a role too, supporting, teaching, and praying for the child as he or she matures in their faith.

Luther also addresses objections from those who believe baptism is just a meaningless performance unless the person can articulate his or her faith. He cautions that this belief risks undermining the power of God's Word, treating baptism like just ordinary water rather than a sacred act. He reminds us that the strength of baptism comes from God, not our efforts nor understanding. To doubt its validity is to doubt God's promise. This teaching encourages everyday believers to trust in the lasting value of Baptism, recognizing it as a gift that remains with us throughout our lives, even if we wander away and later return to faith.

For everyday Christians, infant Baptism is a visible reminder of God's grace. It's not about what the baby does or understands but about what God does, welcoming the child into His family, forgiving sins, and granting eternal life. Luther encourages us to view Baptism as a "daily dress," a way of life whereby we daily repent, turning away from sin and toward Christ Jesus. For parents, it's an act of trust, bringing their little one to God with the hope that the Holy Spirit will nurture their child's tender faith. For the church, it's a call to support and pray for the baptized children, helping them grow in their faith in the resurrected Christ Jesus.

In a world full of uncertainties, the *Large Catechism* brings a simple, powerful message: infant baptism is God's work, anchored in His inerrant and infallible Word. It's a precious gift that starts in infancy and carries us through life, inviting us daily to let go of sin and rise with Christ Jesus. For each believer, this teaching offers peace, assuring us that God's promises hold true, no matter how young or old we may be. †

*The Rev. Dr. Cary G. Larson serves The AALC as Presiding Pastor.*



*Baptism is more than a nice ritual we follow; it's a special moment where God's Word meets water, where the Holy Spirit creates a saving faith, regardless of the age of the one baptized.*



# Baptism



## The Nature of Baptism

By Rev. Nigel Brown

When I was about ten years old, I asked my pastor about the water in the baptismal font and whether it came from a special source. “Yes,” he said, “it comes from Jerusalem. We get it shipped to us for baptisms.” He chuckled afterwards and admitted that it just comes straight from the tap. Then we moved on without further discussion.

If he were to look back on this encounter, he might kick himself for missing a golden opportunity. When a 10-year-old expresses concern for the provenance of the baptismal water, he is tacitly acknowledging that there is something very special happening in baptism. It’s as though I had asked, “Wow! What kind of water can do such amazing work?” Those of you who recall the *Small Catechism* are ready with the answer. “Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God’s command and combined with God’s Word.”<sup>1</sup>

Where does the water come from? Well, it really doesn’t matter. Whether the water comes from the tap or the tears of Jesus Himself, it doesn’t matter. What matters is that the water is joined to the Word of God. The same word that spoke the world into existence, “let there be” (Gen 1). The same word that healed a leper, “I will; be clean” (Mat 8:3). The same word that spoke life into a dead corpse, “Lazarus, come out” (Jn 11:43). God’s Word comes to us with power. His Word also comes to us with love.

Prior to His ascension Jesus gathered the eleven apostles and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mat 28:18–20). Weeks later, Peter preached a sermon on the day of Pentecost that struck a chord and brought the previously obstinate Jews to this appeal, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:27). To this Peter responded, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will

receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (Acts 2:28–39).

Peter later wrote in his first epistle, “Baptism, which corresponds to [the Noahic flood], now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 3:21). Baptism saves you. That is God’s Word, a promise that He cannot and will not break.

That which God promises, He delivers. God is always faithful. Thus, in the waters of Holy Baptism, God’s promise to wash away your sins, to bury you with Christ that you may be raised anew, born from above, are fulfilled. This is no empty promise. Luther wrote in the *Large Catechism*: “Here stand God’s Word and Command, which institute, establish, and confirm Baptism. What God institutes and commands cannot be an empty thing. It must be a most precious thing, even though it looked like it had less value than a straw.”<sup>2</sup> He goes on to say that the water is “divine water. Not that the water in itself is nobler than other water, but that God’s Word and command are added to it.”<sup>3</sup>

Isaiah says of God’s Word, “so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa 55:11). This means that all who have been baptized can rejoice! God has made you a promise that the otherwise ordinary water of holy baptism has been made extraordinary by the Word of God added to it. The water and the Word declare to you the complete washing away of your sin, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and life everlasting for Christ’s sake.

Is this too complicated for a 10-year-old to understand? I think not.✚

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 285.

<sup>2</sup> McCain, Paul Timothy et al., eds. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions; A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord*. 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 423.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.





# The Blessings of Baptism

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By Rev. Alexander McNally

Luther explains in the *Small Catechism* the belief that baptism “works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this.”<sup>1</sup> As we hear this teaching, our first question in response might be something like, “How can this be?” Luther, of course, anticipates this in the *Small Catechism*’s next question: “How can water do such great things?”<sup>2</sup> I will try not to step on the toes of the person writing the article on that subject. For Christians from traditions that believe baptism is an outward profession of faith and delivers no supernatural gifts, their question might be something more like, “How can you Lutherans believe such a thing?” Luther anticipates this question as well. His answer? We believe that baptism forgives, rescues, and saves “as the words and promises of God declare.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, we believe that baptism does such great things because that is what God tells us baptism does.

Scripture is full of statements emphasizing the saving power of God in baptism. In answering his catechism question, “Which are these words and promises of God?”<sup>4</sup> Luther emphasizes the promise of Jesus from Mark 16:16 that says, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” St. Peter says on the day of Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). St. Paul writes that you were “buried with [Christ] in baptism, in which you were also raised with him thorough faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col 2:12). St. Peter proclaims that baptism “now saves you” (1 Pet 3:21). In these passages, and many more, God tells us exactly what the benefits of baptism are. When we say that baptism does all these great things, we are simply taking God at His Word.

You may hear an objection to Luther’s list of the benefits of baptism. Some might say, “Baptism cannot give all these gifts. Only Jesus can forgive, rescue, and save!” To the second part of this statement, we wholeheartedly agree. Baptism is not a work separate from the saving work of Christ. Through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave, Jesus paid the debt for all our sins, rescued us from death and the devil, and won our eternal salvation. When St. Peter says, “Baptism now saves you,” he does not separate baptism from the work of Christ but instead calls it “an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Christ.” Notice that Peter does not say that baptism saves apart from Christ, but **through** Christ. Baptism does not give us anything more or less than what God promises through Jesus’ saving work.

But how do we receive these great benefits of baptism? You may have heard another objection that sounds something like this: “If you Lutherans believe that baptism saves you, then why don’t you perform drive-by baptisms with squirt guns and save as many people as you can?” Luther, once again, has anticipated this objection. He says that the ones who receive the benefits of baptism are “all who believe this.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, just as the promises of the Gospel are received by faith, so too are the benefits of baptism. Again, some may object, saying, “If faith receives the benefits of baptism, then why do you baptize infants?” Babies, the argument goes, do not have faith. Therefore, baptism would be of no benefit to them. But far from excluding infants from having faith, Jesus used little children and babes as the standard of faith, even for adults. In fact, Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mat 18:3).

We can look to our baptism as evidence for our salvation, for in this Sacrament, God truly blesses us with the forgiveness of our sins, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation. When we remember our baptism, we are not looking to something other than Jesus to save us. We are looking to Jesus’ saving activity in our own lives. On the cross, and in his resurrection, Jesus accomplished our salvation. Now, in baptism, Jesus delivers the very same salvation to us in a personal, tangible way.✝

*The Rev. Alexander McNally serves the congregation of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, Ellis, KS.*

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1 Martin Luther, *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 23.

2 Ibid, 24.

3 Ibid, 23.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.



*Baptism does not give us  
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# The Power of Baptism

By Rev. Anthony Voltattorni

Satan is busy making fools of us. When it comes to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, that old evil foe would either have us believe that the washing of water with the Word is our own doing, or that it is unimportant, empty, and nothing at all.

We Lutherans may not be so vulnerable to the former lie. After all, when we watch an infant be baptized, we cannot help but see that this Sacrament is not something to be earned. The child is completely passive. Baptism is God's work and not our own. Just as it was not our doing when we were born, so also we play no part in this new birth from the womb of the font (cf. John 3:5). Our faith is not what makes baptism—Thanks be to God!—and since the Sacrament is not dependent upon us, but on the Word of Christ, it is therefore completely reliable. We can trust what baptism promises. It is not a symbol of our dying with Christ, it actually is our dying and rising with Christ. It is not a sign of being adopted into the family of God, it is how we are adopted. It does not represent salvation; it is the full garment

of salvation that is wrapped around you in the water. Baptism gives what only Jesus has earned.

But that other lie from Hell seems far more credible to our fallen senses. After all, whether the font is filled with dirty river water or filtered spring water, it is still just water. It looks no different from the water we use to wash our hands. When someone is baptized, we don't see the Heavens open, or the Spirit descending like a dove. Maybe most noticeable is that the problems of life do not cease after coming away from the font. Quite the contrary, nothing seems to change at all.

So though we still retain this Sacrament in the Church, we don't usually celebrate it. We should, but we don't. We *celebrate* birthdays and promotions and our sports teams, but not many of us even remember the date of our baptism. It might be an important event, but it seems more like something we set aside in a dusty memory book to be stored in a forgotten box.



This is why, in the *Small Catechism*, as soon as Martin Luther teaches us what baptism is and what benefits it brings, he immediately places this question upon our lips: “How can water do such great things?”<sup>1</sup> The answer, of course, is that it can’t.

Just consider the way Scripture speaks about baptism. We hear these high and staggering promises, that it works forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), it saves (1 Tim 3:21), it is called “the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5), it buries us with Christ that we might be raised with Him (Rom 6:3–4). Mere water cannot do any of that. This can only be true because God promises it.

The bronze serpent lifted up in the wilderness would have been nothing but an ugly decoration leading a procession of death. Can you imagine how ridiculous it must have seemed to them? Instead of driving off the snakes, Moses was making one out of metal! How can a scrap of bronze on a pole do anything at all? It can’t unless God’s promise is attached to it (Num 21:8). So it is with baptism.

That doesn’t mean we should think of God’s Word as a magical incantation or spiritual force. We confess that baptism is valid because of the Word of God added to the water. But why is the Word of God in the water powerful? Why is the Word so effective? To answer that, Luther points us to the cross. There, the Crucified Word made flesh opened His spear-riven side to release blood and water for the life of the world.

Hence there is now in baptism this efficacy of the blood of Christ. That is the true caustic soap which not only removes the uncleanness of the outer man, but penetrates to the inner nature, consuming its impurities and cleansing them away, that the heart may become pure in God’s sight. **Thus, the blood of Christ is so effectively mingled with the baptismal water that we must not regard it as mere water, but water beautifully dyed with the precious crimson blood of our dear Savior, Christ.** Baptism, then, cannot rightly be regarded a physical cleansing... it is a healing baptism, a baptism or washing with blood, instituted by none but Christ, the Son of God, and that through his own death.<sup>2</sup>

Baptism works because of Jesus’ death and resurrection. His shed blood is the cleansing power at work in the simple font water. This is why, if you remember, the elder addressing St. John in Revelation refers to those standing around the throne as having “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14). That is what baptism does for us and why we should look upon the water in the font as if it is tinged red! The

Blood of the Lamb is its power. Hence, it is not an exaggeration to say that there is no greater comfort on earth than your baptism. It is a treasure we should cherish and hold dear, for we are those “coming out of the great tribulation” (Rev 7:14) that is this life.

We are afflicted by the corruption of our own flesh drawing us away into sin. We are oppressed by sorrows and sufferings all around us. Our shoulders are weighed down by the torments of a fallen world and the onslaught of accusations from Satan. Which is why that deceiver would have us forget all about this great comfort, for even Satan knows that the power of your baptism remains. “So faith clings to the water and believes that in baptism, there is pure salvation and life. This is not through the water... but through the fact that it is embodied in God’s Word and institution, and that God’s name abides in it.”<sup>3</sup>

There is simply no end to the joy of this teaching, that when the font water hit your forehead invoking the triune name of God, you were sundered from the devil’s grip and delivered into the Kingdom of God. That is why we should wear out our fingers making the sign of the cross on our forehead and repeating this abiding and enduring promise of God: “I am baptized into Christ!” His death has strangled out your death. The forgiveness you need is imparted to you in your baptism, and it still works in you. This is your reassurance whenever your sins assault you and yet another trial bears down on you. God’s Word is trustworthy, and in your baptism, Christ declares, “You are mine! I give you My life, My salvation, My righteousness. Your sins are washed away. They are left buried in the grave. Satan cannot have you, this world cannot take you away from Me, because you are forever joined to My death, My resurrection. You are baptized, dear child!”

Far from being a mere empty sign, baptism is your source of greatest comfort. Your sin and your death are buried in the watery grave of the font and in their place, you bear Jesus’ own life which will not be taken from you by the trials and sufferings of this world.†

All that the mortal eye beholds is water as we pour it.

Before the eye of faith unfolds the pow’r of Jesus’ merit.

For here it sees the crimson flood to all our ills bring healing;

The wonders of His precious blood the love of God revealing,

Assuring His own pardon.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Luther, Martin, *Luther’s Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 24.

2 *The Sermons of Martin Luther* Volume VII (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 243.

3 McCain, Paul Timothy et al., eds. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions; A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord*. 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 426.

4 Luther, Martin. “To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord.” *Lutheran Service Book*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 406:7.



# What Baptism Signifies

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*By Rev. Antonio Romano*



*Baptism does not signify what  
I am doing for Christ but what  
Christ is doing to me.*



The objective nature of what Christ has accomplished for us is beautifully evident in the Sacrament of Baptism. Luther first tells us what baptism is, not water only, but water “included in God’s command and connected with God’s Word.”<sup>1</sup> Luther then tells us this Word of command is that of Christ’s Great Commission in Matthew 28. Next, he tells us what baptism gives or profits: “It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.”<sup>2</sup> And these words and promises are those that grant eternal life. “How can water do such great things?”<sup>3</sup> It is not the water only, but the Word of God in and with the water that accomplishes such heavenly things on earth among men.

The question before us in the fourth part of the explanation is this: “What does such baptizing with water signify?”<sup>4</sup>

There are church traditions in which baptism is nothing more than a signal. However, it is not a signal showing what Christ has done. That it merely symbolizes. The substance to which baptism signals in such traditions is free will, that which the one being baptized exercised to take hold of what Christ purchased. In these traditions, baptism is a symbol of my decision and commitment to Christ. I may even use it throughout my Christian life as a symbol of my rededication if I so choose. It is a work that is mine to make of what I wish. While the work of the cross is that of Christ for me, baptism is my work for Him. The water merely shows that my commitment is binding. “My faith is real!” The divine name is then attached only to make it a distinctly Christian ritual.

In the *Small Catechism*, Luther puts baptism in the framework of how Scripture describes and defines it (mainly Romans 6).

Therefore, it does not signify what I am doing for Christ but what *Christ* is doing to me. God buries me by baptizing me into the death of Christ, “in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). It is heaven’s signal to earth, God’s sign to man, that salvation is happening. Where the first man was created by the hand of God in dust, the new man is created by the word of God in water. The old Adam in us is drowned, and a new life is created that God raises from the dead with Christ.

It is this new life I live now in the flesh by faith in the Son of God “who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Luther writes that baptism signifies, “that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts. And also, it shows that a new man should daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”<sup>5</sup>

Baptism indicates that all Christ accomplished to redeem us and conform us to His image has happened to a human being. Though the conforming work is not yet complete, the only means by which it may begin and continue, has. Like Naaman (2 Ki 5), we are washed. Like Jesus, we are raised. And like Jesus, we shall also live, even though we die. Baptism indicates that our salvation is not hypothetical or potential, floating out there somewhere in the ether of will and enthusiasm. No. Jesus Christ met you in the water. He knows your name. He knows your face and you are His. So, remember your baptism. It indicates that heaven came down and the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ has filled your soul. This is most certainly true.†

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<sup>1</sup> McCain, Paul Timothy et al., eds. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions; A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord*. 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 339.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 340.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



# Congregation Feature



Submitted photo

## Light of Christ Lutheran Church, Williston, ND

Light of Christ Lutheran Church was established in the Fall of 1995, when several families gathered to discuss starting a new AALC congregation in Williston, ND. Many of these individuals played key roles in the founding of The AALC and had served on various boards, including one as national treasurer. The congregation held their first church service at Spring Lake Park and later purchased an unused Wesleyan church building. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the congregation's establishment.

Current pastor Rev. Kevin Beard graduated from Luther Seminary in 2007 and served as pastor for three years at two rural ELCA congregations in central North Dakota. Due to the changing direction of the ELCA, he left the denomination in 2010 and returned to his hometown of Williston to establish a Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) church, which led to the founding of Mission Lutheran. This small congregation conducted services at various locations including the Sons of Norway building, the Nursing Home Chapel, and even a local concrete company during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mission Lutheran was a church without a building.

During a pastoral vacancy at Light of Christ, two cousins, one from Mission Lutheran and the other from Light of Christ, began considering the possibility of merging the two congregations. Discussions were held, leading to their first joint service with a Polka Service on November 1, 2020. The following year involved working out the details of merging the two congregations. Light of Christ, being the larger congregation, retained its name, and all funds from Mission Lutheran were brought into LOC. Pastor Kevin began the process of colloquizing into The AALC, which was completed at the annual Pastor's Conference in 2021. The merger has been a blessing as the two congregations are now one in Christ.

Light of Christ is a vibrant congregation with a heart for service. Along with our Sunday worship services, there are Bible Studies and Confirmation Classes led by the pastor. Women of L.I.F.E. meets each month with a business meeting and Bible Study. There are many children in the congregation, and our Sunday School meets every week during school months. We support Operation Christmas Child and are a local drop-off for the shoeboxes which are shipped worldwide. Coffee hour provides mutual consolation of the saints before worship each Sunday.

Our church is well known for our generosity with food. The community is invited to our Annual Easter Festival where kids hear of the death and resurrection of our Lord, collect Easter Eggs filled with candy and a Scripture verse, and participate in a "Cake Walk" where each family receives a cake. We host an annual "Soup and Chili Cookoff" with the winner receiving a handsome homemade trophy. There is the annual "Fishers of Men" ice fishing competition which involves much more food than the catching of fish. We also host a monthly "Church Breakfast."

We have many projects, both ongoing and completed. We received a grant from the city of Williston to remodel our basement and have hosted Amy's Angels Daycare for the past three years with approximately 60 kids attending. We have added offices to the upstairs level and an altar wall with a stained-glass cross made by the congregation. We look forward to the possibility of replacing the side windows of the sanctuary and making our own stained glass for them as well.

Light of Christ Lutheran Church is a vibrant congregation with a heart for service. We pray that God in His mercy would continue to use us to be a light here in the middle of oil country and to serve those around us in the community.✚





# Clergy Feature



*Rev. John Morley III with his wife, Gigi. Submitted photo.*

## Rev. John Morley

### Where are you serving now?

I currently am blessed to serve the saints at Christ the Ray of Hope Lutheran Church in Albuquerque, NM. Through the Word, Sacrament, prayer, and fellowship we strive to **Help Other People Eternally** to know the love and life of Christ. Toward this purpose, we are very active in mission work locally, nationally, and worldwide. Following Rev. Harold Johnson's retirement in October of 2022, I was called by the saints of Christ the Ray of Hope in March of 2023.

### What do you most want your congregation to know?

The breadth and depth of love of God for YOU! That His grace is sufficient and His power is made perfect in our weakness! God's Word is enough. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). What an amazing thing it is to believe, teach, and confess that we are saved by grace through faith and none of this is up to us, but all God's work and doing.

### What brings you joy in your tasks as pastor?

To me, there is no greater calling and vocation than being an under-shepherd for the Good Shepherd – a servant in God's House. In Luther's sacristy prayer we read, "Lord God, You have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in Your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon You: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word...." This is more than just a weekly prayer, it is a daily reminder of where my strength, joy and hope lie. What greater joy can one have than talking about

Christ every day! Sharing Christ's comfort, speaking His Word of forgiveness, serving, praying, studying, praying, learning, growing, and praying some more! The list can, and does, go on, but my true joy comes from serving the Lord and His people.

### What is one of the biggest challenges you see Christians facing?

Allow me to borrow some familiar words from the Lord's Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation." As we know, "we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice." We are most certainly attacked by these things constantly and contend daily with the devil, the world and our own sin filled nature. This truly is a battle as old as time and knows no time nor boundaries. Praise be to God that we have a God who is stronger and bigger than any of this. Led by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, we pray to be guarded from the tempter's temptations to misbelief, despair and other great shame and vice. In ALL these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us (cf. Rom. 8).

### Where have you seen God working lately?

I see God's hand at work every morning when I remember His baptismal promise to me. I see it in my wife, family, and friends that He has given me. I see it in the people He brings to the church and shopping center that has been entrusted to our care. I see it every Sunday as God gathers and calls His people to be strengthened and nourished through the Word and Sacraments. I am humbled and honored to see God working in the love, care, and compassion of Christ the Ray of Hope, in The AALC, and in His hand of abundant provision in our seminary! To God be all glory, honor and praise! †



# What's New at the Seminary?

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American Lutheran Theological Seminary (ALTS) continues its unwavering commitment to the Holy Bible as the infallible, inerrant, and inspired Word of God. Also, our seminary makes a quia subscription to the Lutheran Confessions because they are the right exposition of God's Holy Word. ALTS maintains its tradition of providing quality theological education for all of its degree programs. It gives particular emphasis to the spiritual development of future pastors, emphasizing the role of the "Seelsorger," the Soul Caregiver, because they will be charged with providing genuine, Christ-centered, pastoral care for the souls in their keeping.

For these reasons and many others, our seminary is experiencing unprecedented growth. Currently, our seminary is offering a variety of academic programs: Master of Divinity, Master of Arts in Religion, Master of Arts in Theology, Doctor of Ministry, and auditing students. Our applicants are primarily from Lutheran congregations across the U.S. However, we have a growing number of applicants from other Christian denominations who desire to learn about Lutheran distinctives of faith and life. In addition, ALTS is growing in the number of international students who are joining our student body. We continue to offer graduate level courses in four areas of study: Biblical/Exegetical studies, Doctrinal/Confessional studies, Historical studies, and Practical Ministry studies.

Beginning this year, ALTS has made a couple of significant curriculum changes. The first is the addition of several elective courses that formerly have not been available. In the fall and winter of 2025 and 2026 respectively, we will offer Hebrew I and Hebrew 2. Other ancient language electives will soon follow: Hebrew writings, exploring the Hebrew text of the Pentateuch or the Prophets; Catholic Epistles, exploring the Greek text of one of the seven General Epistles; and Greek Readings, just to keep students current in their Greek language skills. In addition, ALTS will add an elective in historical studies, Medieval Church History. The other significant addition to our curriculum is the introduction of a Doctor of Ministry degree, which began in the spring of this year. We currently have nine students in our inaugural cohort of the D.Min. program, eight AALC pastors and one from a sister Lutheran church body.

This summer, in addition to our regular schedule of courses for credit, ALTS is offering a Seminary Intensive Study. This in-person instruction is a detailed analysis of John's Gospel. It includes nine teaching sessions: Isagogics (Rev. Hofinga), Theology (Dr. Cooper), Themes (Dr. Caughey), two presentations on Exegetical Problems (Pr. Fenn), three presentations on Preaching John's Gospel (Pr. Voltattorni), and a final session on Pastoral Care in the Gospel of John (Dr. Stover). The Seminary Intensive Study is planned for June 23–25 in Ames, IA.

Finally, here are some miscellaneous items about the seminary that may be of interest to you:

- **New Growth:** As you might expect, with all of these courses and degree programs, our faculty is GROWING too! Currently, there are 13 instructors who are providing 47 courses on a two-year rotation.
- **Faculty Advisors:** We have established Faculty Advisors for all of our men preparing for Holy Ministry (M.Div. candidates). So, even though our student body is growing, we are still making sure that we are providing personal and pastoral care for our students.
- **Website:** ALTS will be launching a new website early this summer. We hope that you will like it! It is designed to help our seminary to be seen and recognized throughout the Lutheran community in the U.S.A. and around the whole world. Visit [alts.edu](http://alts.edu) and receive weekly devotions and daily worship with the seminary community,



- **Prayer:** Many of you have asked how you can support our seminary. The very most important gift that you can give us is prayer! Please remember our students, faculty, and staff in your personal prayers. Please pray that our Lord will continue to bless our seminary with genuine faithfulness, sound teachings, and hearts conformed to the will of Christ. Also, please pray for vicars, supervisors, and for more students!

- **Questions:** If you have questions or concerns about American Lutheran Theological Seminary, please do not hesitate to contact ALTS. You may visit us online: [alts.edu](https://alts.edu), or write us: ALTS 921 East Dupont Road, #920 Fort Wayne, IN 46825, or call us: 260.755.9401.

That's "What's New at the Seminary."†

*The Rev. Dr. Curtis E. Leins serves as President of the American Lutheran Theological Seminary (ALTS).*

# New Registrar of ALTS

By Rev. Benjamin Baker

I come from perhaps what is a somewhat unusual background: I was born into a Jewish Lutheran home. My mom grew up in the Lutheran Church of America (LCA), and my dad was raised in Judaism and was converted to Christianity through the witness of my mom. I was baptized into the Lutheran Church and grew up in the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC), which my parents joined the year I was born.

In this context I grew up hearing and participating in the liturgies of Passover and Hanukkah, among some others. Growing up hearing the Hebrew language and committing to memory many aspects of the liturgies, particularly of Passover, instilled in me a love of the Old Testament and the Hebrew language. Add to this the Christian faith taught to me by my parents and in church, and I have come to love especially how Jesus is the Subject of the Old Testament and the Scriptures as a whole, and how He is what the liturgy of Passover, among other feasts, is all about.

It is also out of this context that I have been very much concerned with the concept of Israel in the Old Testament as primarily a spiritual term, that is, that it speaks of and describes the people of faith in the promise of Christ, who is Himself true Israel and true Humanity.

Some of my other interests lie in the areas of systematic theology, the theology of our Lutheran Confessions and the biblical exegesis that lies behind it, church history, particularly in the areas of liturgical development and practice and the theology of the Church Fathers, especially as it connects to the theology we confess in the Book of Concord.

I currently serve the congregations of St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church in Traer, IA, and St. Paul

Lutheran Congregation in Tripoli, IA. My wife, Gretchen, and I have been married for 10 years and we have one daughter, Meg.

I was appointed to the Association Council for The AALC in 2024 and serve as registrar (in training) for ALTS since February of 2025. I will also be teaching Hebrew I and II for ALTS starting this fall.

As the Registrar for ALTS, I am responsible for getting students registered for their classes, as well as answering questions that they may have regarding classes. I also function as the second step of our two-step application process. The first step is a conversation with ALTS Admin Rev. John Holst. The second step is sending the prospective student the application packet, and that is what I do. I am also in communication with prospective students throughout the application process. I am also responsible for handling transcripts for students.

One of the tasks that I have been assigned this year is to run point on the implementation of a new Learning Management System (LMS). An LMS is what students interact with in terms of class information, transcripts, submitting application documents, paying tuition and fees, online classroom, student info, etc. We are in the process of switching over to the Populi LMS. Populi will help ALTS streamline a number of different tasks that need to be done, from class registration, to Zoom class links, communication between faculty and students, online payments for tuition and fees, information inquiries and applications, etc. Populi also allows faculty to set up tests and quizzes for students to take, and other things like this that will be helpful for ALTS. In regard to the accreditation process through ABHE, Populi has built-in reports that it can generate in the format that ABHE wants, and so this should save us time and make the accreditation process more efficient.

# Women of L.I.F.E.

## Baptism Gifts From WOL

By Katherine Hofinga

As good Lutherans, we all know that baptism is a work of God, not a work of man...thanks be to God!

But there are people involved in the baptism, and some of them are working behind the scenes to get ready for the big day. The pastor offers instruction to the parents and sponsors. Parents invite relatives to celebrate the event... And often a faithful older woman in the church will make sure that there is a baptismal cloth that has been embroidered with a cross and maybe the baby's name, ready to wipe the baby's head after the baptism.

At Lake Madison Lutheran Church in South Dakota, one of our women personalizes a banner for the occasion. I'm sure many other churches have similar customs. Thanks be to God that He uses our gifts and talents to celebrate and remember our baptism! †



Submitted Photos

## Church Installs Patio as a Welcome

Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church of Frazier Park, CA, has installed a brand-new patio to welcome members and visitors of their congregation.

The funding for this large project was generated from several sources, including a couple who moved from our area and donated the entire contents of their home to the women (of the church) for a rummage sale.

The church also hosted a reunion for the Vietnamese families that were resettled from a refugee camp to our community back in 1979; they made several gifts of money to thank us for what we did for them- it was such a blessing. †



Submitted Photos



## IN MEMORIAM

### Rev. Steven Smeback July 24, 1951 – April 29, 2025

It is with sadness that we announce the unexpected passing of Reverend Steven Paul Smeback on April 29, 2025, in Vancouver, WA. He was the long-time pastor of Elim Lutheran Church in Hockinson, WA, and beloved by those who knew him.

Steve's life began in Detroit Lakes, MN, on July 24, 1951. He was the oldest child of the late Dwight A. Smeback and Patricia L. (Groth) Smeback of Selah, WA. Steve spent his childhood and school age years in Selah, graduating from Selah High School in 1969. He received his Master of Divinity from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, MO, and began his nearly 50 year career as a pastor in Vancouver, WA.

Steve was a loyal servant of God and passionate about sharing his love of the Lord with others. He was dedicated to loving and building his church community and using worship music to inspire members of his congregation. He cared deeply for others and was known to patiently stay with families and pray with them during times of joy and sorrow. Steve was a devoted father, grandfather, brother, son, and a cherished member of his church community. He leaves behind a legacy of love and faith.

Steve was loved by many and leaves a hole in the hearts of his family and friends who were entertained by his stories and sense of humor. He is survived by his mother, Patricia Smeback, son Tyeson (Charlene) Smeback, daughter Brooke Miller, grandchildren Gwenne and Maven Miller and Colton and Callie Smeback. Steve loved and was loved by all his siblings and he leaves behind his three brothers, David (Shelley), Scott (Teresa) and Dennis (Tammy) Smeback, and his sister Terryl Smeback (Mic Mackey). He is also survived by his aunts, numerous cousins, nieces, nephews and great nieces and nephews.

Funeral services were held Saturday, May 24, 2025, in Brush Prairie, WA.†

God bless the memory of Rev. Smeback. Thanks be to God!



## July 2025

### PRAYER BOOKMARK

1. North Plains Region of TAALC
2. For all to become baptized children of God
3. Rev. Paul Johansen
4. College & University Campus Chaplains
5. Rev. Dr. Cary Larson, Presiding Pastor of The AALC
6. Rev. Carl Bengston
7. For the Youth
8. Rev. Dean Stoner, Admin. Asst. to The AALC
9. Abiding Grace Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
10. Board of Directors of TAALC Foundation
11. For churches to teach the Sacrament of Baptism
12. Rev. John Linch
13. Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, Williston, ND
14. Youth, Chaperones, Speakers traveling to the Youth Conference
15. Rev. Dr. Duane Lindberg
16. Dss. Brigitte Gassman
17. American Lutheran Church, Mandan, ND
18. Youth, Chaperones, Speakers traveling home from the Youth Conference
19. Youth Groups
20. Martha Stone, Commissioned Church Worker
21. Women of L.I.F.E. Groups
22. For those who are not Baptized to be taught this gift
23. Faith Lutheran Church, Columbus, ND
24. To believe Baptism is a gracious water of life
25. Rev. John Anderson
26. To remember we are baptized in Christ's death and resurrection
27. Rev. Kevin Beard
28. To remember Baptism works forgiveness of sins
29. Rev. Norman Beighley
30. To remember Baptism delivers us from death and the devil
31. First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Parshall, ND



# August 2025

## PRAYER BOOKMARK

1. Kongsvinger Lutheran Church, Oslo, MN
2. Rev. David Huskamp
3. To remember Baptism gives us eternal salvation
4. Commission for Youth Activities
5. Rev. Dean Johansen
6. Commission for American Missions
7. Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche (SELK)
8. Rev. Morris Kirchhof
9. Light of Christ Lutheran Church, Williston, ND
10. Prison Chaplains
11. Rev. Abraham McNally
12. To remember Baptism makes us holy and acceptable before God
13. Rev. Harold Petersen
14. Karen Young, *Evangel* Layout Designer
15. To remember Baptism is the beginning of the life of faith
16. Rev. Chris Rosebrough
17. Lucky Mound Lutheran Church, Ryder, ND
18. For all to believe in the infallibility & inerrancy of Scripture
19. Hospital Chaplains
20. Rev. Gregory Stenzel
21. Trinity Lutheran Church, Galata, MT
22. New Congregations
23. Pr. Oliver Urdahl
24. Pastors and Church Workers
25. To remember our pastors are given as a gift to the church
26. New Hope Lutheran Church, Newfolden, MN
27. Youth Directors
28. Parish Education Commission
29. Bonnie Ohlrich, Executive Secretary & Office Manager
30. Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church, Sidney, MT
31. Rev. Andrew Virkus

## IN MEMORIAM

### Rev. David Swarthout June 26, 1931 – April 26, 2025

The Rev. David Swarthout Sr., entered the Church, Triumphant on Saturday, April 26, 2025. He was 93 years old.

Pr. Swarthout served in the Air Force in Korea, 10 years as a missionary in Mexico, came back to the States, and entered the seminary to become a Lutheran pastor.

Pr. Swarthout was the beloved pastor of the El Camino Pines Lutheran Church at the El Camino Pines Lutheran Camp from 1985 until the congregation built the new facility in Lake of the Woods. In 2011, the congregation changed their name to Shepherd of The Mountains Lutheran Church, and that was the same year that Pastor Dave retired. The “Los Posadas” was a favorite service he brought to our congregation from his early ministry to the church in Mexico.

Pastor Dave was well-known throughout the mountain communities as was his wife, Audrey, and their son, David Jr. Pastor Dave and his wife, Audrey, observed their 72nd wedding anniversary in 2024.

Pr. Swarthout was an Emeritus Pastor on the Clergy Roster of The American Association of Lutheran Churches, having been accepted onto the Roster in 2010. He served our sister congregation Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church, (formerly known as El Camino Pines Lutheran Church) Frazier Park CA from 1985 – 2010.

His favorite saying was, “Absent from the body is present with the Lord!”

Services were held at Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church in Pinetop, AZ, on May 17, 2025. †

God bless the memory of Rev. Swarthout. Thanks be to God!



# AALC Gives to Hurricane Relief Efforts

In late September of last year, Hurricane Helene hit the United States, causing unfathomable damage to homes, communities, and people. Since that time, The American Association of Lutheran Churches has raised over \$11,000 to date for hurricane victims.

Specifically, The AALC provided \$4,000 to the LC-MS Disaster Relief Team that is on the ground serving the Helene storm and flood victims of North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee.

Our Association gave another \$4,000 to Emmanuel Lutheran Church (LC-MS) Hurricane Disaster Relief Foundation of Asheville, NC. The faith community is located in the heart of the devastation to North Carolina. In a letter they recently sent us, they described some of the on-going work that they are doing for the area, including:

- Replaced destroyed household furniture that is not covered by insurance
- Provided needed income to workers who are without work due to the storm damage
- Assisted with catastrophic home repairs that FEMA funds or insurance will not cover

The AALC also wanted to provide help to a specific family or individual in need with regards to Hurricane Helene. Thanks to the work of Rev. Joe Christina, our National Home Missions Developer, we found a North Carolina family that had lost everything in the flood waters of the storm. Below is some of their story, as told by Kevin and Christi Lorenz of Asheville, NC.

In September, two days before Hurricane Helene, two rain storms dumped about 10-15 inches of rain on our property. When Helene came... the shearing winds began to change our home and property forever. We lost 10 trees and our roof shingles were peeled back like a fruit roll-up. The rain then began pouring through our kitchen, finding the paths of least resistance. Buckets full of water came through our light fixtures, down the sides of the cabinets, and the walls ended up under our hardwood flooring.

Finding gas and water were a top priority that often took hours to secure. I was scheduled for a total shoulder replacement about two weeks after the storm, which promptly got canceled until Nov. 6. During all this time, God was so faithful in helping us with every need. Family and friends came to our rescue to tarp the roof etc. one day after the storm.

For the weeks that followed I told myself it is like camping! Actually, it was a lot harder than camping. Tears of joy flowed again the first time I flushed the toilet!

Around the beginning of February, we began thinking that we should have someone check out the kitchen walls and flooring for moisture. Because there was measurable moisture and with that the probability of mold and mildew. Two air scrubbers were placed in the house until the cabinets could be removed. And indeed, there was a lot of black mold on the sheet rock and the insulation.

One of our biggest challenges, as you might imagine, is the insurance company and the slow moving of all the parts to secure money. In the meantime, invoices are coming in and need to be paid. Because of the incredible generosity of others, such as The AALC, we have been able to pay our bills. There are no words that capture our grateful hearts for all of this assistance. The body of Christ has done as our Lord Jesus asks it to do ...to help those who are in need. In our 45 years of marriage, we have never gone through anything like this and praise our heavenly Father for His care and faithfulness to our family.

Your gifts and contributions to the Hurricane Helene Relief has made a difference in the lives of many people and communities affected by the storm. Thanks be to God! †



*Damage to the home of Kevin and Christi Lorenz of Asheville, NC, from the flooding caused by excessive rain, followed by Hurricane Helene. Submitted photos.*



## The American Association of Lutheran Churches

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## UPCOMING EDITIONS...

**Overarching theme: Chief Parts of Luther's Small Catechism**

**Please be in prayer for these upcoming editions:**

Sept/Oct: Confession & Lord's Supper (*deadline July 1*)

Nov/Dec: Table of Duties (*deadline Sept. 1*)

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### 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)

**Or mail:** St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church, Attn: Gretchen Baker  
207 Taylor St., Traer, IA 50675