

The **EVANGEL**

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Pg. 2 — From the Editor

Pg. 3 — From the Presiding
Pastor

Pg. 4-5 — Let Us Pray Together

Pg. 6 — A Stable & A Cross

Pg. 7 — Ordination &
Installation of The
Rev. Michael Callahan

Pg. 8-9 — A Strategic Ministry
Plan That Made a Difference

Pg. 10-11 — 140 Years Old with
New Horizons

Pg. 12 — Youth Conference

Pg. 13 — Come and See

Pg. 14 — Women of L.I.F.E.
Bible Study

Pg. 14 — Meet a Seminarian

Pg. 15 — Confess and
Be Cleansed

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Letter From the Editor

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! This edition of *The Evangel* focuses on personal prayer and worship. We have had editions on prayer before, but this is a little different; this isn't so much about prayer in the abstract, but rather the discipline of practicing daily prayer, family worship, or personal devotions.

In general, when we hear the word "discipline" we may immediately think that this is something painful—some kind of correction for errant practice. But, when we speak here of spiritual discipline, we mean a practice or training to cultivate good and holy habits. This is not to say that there isn't anything painful about it. Certainly mortifying the sinful flesh and its desires and ways can be painful, but the goal is a life that naturally does the thing that we try to practice.

At the time of Jesus, Jews would have prayed multiple times per day. Those prayers were often memorized. Their days were shaped by worshipping God. This is why when the disciples came to Jesus and asked him how to pray, Jesus gives them a prayer that we still say to this day! Jesus says to his disciples:

In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

(*Matt. 6:9-13 NKJV*)

As you make your way through this edition, I pray that you will be blessed. And, as you fight the Winter chill and look toward Spring with hope, I hope that knowing your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ are praying with you will bring incredible comfort.

In Christ,

Lisa Cooper

To submit to *The Evangel*, please email your articles and/or photos to theevangel@taalc.org. I will be stepping away as editor of *The Evangel* in the coming weeks, so please use this email address for submissions so the next editor can receive your submissions. I am so grateful for my time spent as editor of *The Evangel*. It's been over seven years! Can you believe it? I have loved getting to know so many of you, and learning more about your churches and ministries. Blessings to you all.

Let Your Mind Dwell On These Things

by TAALC Presiding Pastor, The Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. (Phil. 4:8)

His name was Christopher. He loved to read his Bible. Even as a young boy, he read his Bible most mornings and every night before bed. By age 12, it was a habit, a spiritual discipline if you will. But, he did not think of it as a chore or an obligation. No one made him do it. In fact, most nights, no one even knew. But, he knew.

"A Scripture a day keeps the devil away," he thought to himself. In his little life, there did not appear to be anything that should upset or frighten him. His Christian parents loved him. He was well cared-for and popular. But, still he had his worries: a teacher that he thought was mean, a student that did not like him, a scary movie that kept him awake. So, he would read his Bible, and say his prayers. He liked it. It gave him peace.

By the year 2001, Christopher was 21. He was still reading his Bible every night. But, something had happened. The world had changed. On September 11th, the Twin Towers had fallen, and the Pentagon had been attacked. Planes had been hijacked and thousands of Americans had died. We were at war and we needed young men to fight for our country.

Christopher enlisted. He became an Infantryman in the U.S. Army. Soon, he was deployed in Operation Iraqi Freedom. For the first time in his life, he was away from home. Even more, he was out of the country and in harm's way. He wore a heavy, kevlar vest with plates and a helmet every hour of the day and many nights. He became very familiar with close quarters combat.

He quickly realized that King David was a warrior too and that many of the Psalms were written for just such an experience. He was glad to carry a G.I. Bible in his pocket and to have its comfort each night. Christopher understood that there were many things that could occupy his mind and consume his thoughts. There was a battleground on Iraqi soil and there was one in his mind too. He would fight and win the mind-battle by reading his Bible, and by letting his, "mind dwell on these things."

Today, 2020, Christopher is 40 years old. He has a wife, family, and a good job. Today, he does not face childhood nightmares or the warfare of Iraqi Freedom. Today, he faces COVID-19, financial uncertainty, employment challenges, and today he still reads his Bible every night.

His spiritual discipline has served him for as long as he can remember. It is not a chore or an obligation. It is who he is. It is what he does. And, in a world that seeks to steal his peace and rob him of joy, "A Scripture a day keeps the devil away." And so, tonight, like every night, he will read his Bible, say his prayers, and let his, "mind dwell on these things."

As you may have guessed, Christopher is a real person. He is my son.

Let Us Pray Together

by Lisa Cooper

Because this edition of *The Evangel* is focused on personal prayer and worship, I offer here some prayers to help get you started, and also have included a comprehensive list of AALC churches that you can pray for by name. Some people find written prayers especially helpful when approaching God in personal prayer and worship. Others prefer spur-of-the-moment prayers. This section will hopefully appeal to everyone because it allows for both meditative written prayers and prayers from the moment. Feel free to use this resource as you like. I also hope you look up some of the prayer books cited here if any of these prayers especially resonate with you.

When we gather together in prayer, we can trust that God hear us—the God who created the universe, who sustains everything, who has redeemed us from sin, death, and the power of the evil one. He is listening. We go to Him in prayer, trusting that He loves us and wants to hear our petitions.

God's Command and Promise Regarding Prayer

by Martin Luther

Dear Lord! You know that I cannot come before You on account of my own self, my presumption or my worthiness. Just as I might desire to look upon You, yet in the same way I would not be permitted to do so and would not even know how I might begin to pray. Nevertheless I do come before You because You Yourself have commanded it and You earnestly encourage that we should call upon You. You have even pledged a promise. You sent Your own Son, He who teaches what we should pray, and You have promised to give us the words that we use in prayer. Therefore I know that such prayer indeed pleases You, and that my claim, that I may commend myself as a child of God before You, as great as that may seem, comes from the fact that I must obey You as You would have it. May I never inflict lies upon You and through other and greater sins trespass against You, thereby despising Your command and rejecting the gift of faith in Your promise. (*Lutheran Book of Prayer*, 9)

For the Church at Large

Lord Jesus Christ, in this world of unrest and strife You founded Your holy Christian Church through faith as a kingdom of peace and joy. You have established this worldwide communion of saints in which all believers are joined by the invisible bond of faith and in which we are gathered around Your Word and Sacraments. I thank You for making me a citizen in Your holy kingdom through the cleansing waters of Baptism. I praise You for Your goodness because You bestowed upon me and all Your children Your Holy Spirit. Keep the flame of faith alive in all believers through the forgiveness and peace given us through Your precious body and blood in the bread and wine of the Sacrament. Continue to fill us with the spirit of love



and peace toward one another. Make us the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Fulfill among us Your promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against Your Church. Extend Your kingdom so that Your salvation reaches to the ends of the earth. Hear us for the sake of Your truth. Amen. (*Lutheran Book of Prayer*, 144)

Of a Pastor

O God, our Heavenly Father, who raised up your faithful servant (Name), to be a pastor in your Church and to feed your flock: Give abundantly to all pastors the gifts of your Holy Spirit, that they may minister in your household as true servants of Christ and stewards of your divine mysteries; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (*Book of Common Prayer*, 248)

Prayer of an Anxious Soul That Knows Not the Source of Its Anxiety

O Lord, since I know not whence arises this anguish which troubles and oppresses me in body and soul, whether from heaven or hell, of from mine own weak and diseased body, I flee unto Thee, Father of all mercy and God of comfort, to seek renewal and relief in Thee. Say unto me "Be of good cheer, my son, (daughter), thy sins are forgiven thee," and grant me confidence that this unrest in my members cometh neither by Thy curse nor wrath. So speak unto me that I may find that peace which passeth all understanding; and I shall bow under every anguish which Thy mighty hand sends me, and be at peace in the midst of unrest. Have mercy upon me, O great God, have mercy upon me for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen. (*Seed Grains of Prayer*, 119)

A Remembrance of the Sufferings of Jesus

O Christ, who canst cause men to be blessed, make me blessed whom Thou hast redeemed by Thy cross and Thine own precious blood. O my God, help me this day and at all times. Most holy, immortal God, have mercy upon me, a poor sinner, and keep me both in body and soul unto everlasting life, now and evermore. Amen. (*Seed Grains of Prayer*, 172)

Psalm 103

*First read the Psalm, then pray along with Luther:

Father of Light, we praise You because You forgive iniquity and do not reward us according to our sins. What you promised to the fathers You have fulfilled in Your Son. As the east and the west can never come together, so remove our sins far from us, that they can be accounted to us no more, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen. (*Reading the Psalms with Luther*, 244)

Relying on God

Lord, I know that I cannot produce or preserve for myself even a piece of daily bread. Nor can I guard myself against any need or misfortune. Therefore I will pray as you order, and I hope to receive as you promise, for you take my need to heart and help before I even think of asking. If I please you, let it happen; if I do not, let it not happen. Amen. (*Luther's Prayers*, 96)

To Serve God with Thoughts, Affections, and Will

Ultimately turn from us all sins. By your grace, fill us with all virtue and good works. Help us to become your kingdom. Grant that we may with all our thoughts, affections, and will, and with all bodily and spiritual strength, obediently serve you according to your will and commandments. Permit these powers to be ruled only by you, and not to obey themselves, the flesh, the world, and the devil. Amen. (*Luther's Prayers*, 30)

In Time of Affliction and Distress

Almighty and everlasting God, the Consolation of the sorrowful and the Strength of the weak, may the prayers of them that in any tribulation or distress cry to Thee, graciously come before Thee, so that in all their necessities they may mark and receive Thy manifold help and comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen. (*The Brotherhood Prayer Book*, 597)

For the Sick

O Lord, look down from heaven, behold, visit, and relieve Thy servants for whom we offer our supplications; look upon them with the eyes of Thy mercy; give them comfort and sure confidence in Thee, defend them from the danger of the enemy, and keep them in perpetual peace and safety; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen. (*The Brotherhood Prayer Book*, 597).

For Peace

O God, who art the Author of peace and Lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom, defend us, Thy humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies, that we, surely trusting in Thy defense, may not fear the power of any adversaries; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen. (*The Brotherhood Prayer Book*, 603).

Consecration

O Jesus Christ, I live to you; I die to you; living or dying, I am yours. Romans 14:7. Amen. (*Luther's Prayers*, 71)

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Reading the Psalms with Luther. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007.

TAALC Churches

Faith Lutheran Church *Watseka, IL*
 St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church *Augusta, KY*
 Christ Lutheran Church *Germantown, MD*
 Christ the King Lutheran Church *Chesterfield, MI*
 Trinity Lutheran Church *West Hempstead, NY*
 Christus Victor Ev. Lutheran Church *Fayetteville, NC*
 Christus Victor Lutheran Church *Milton, FL*
 Good Shepherd Lutheran Church *Franklin, NC*
 Our Savior Lutheran Church *Piqua, OH*
 Peace Lutheran Church *Defiance, OH*
 St. Paul's Lutheran Church *Napoleon, OH*
 Bethel Lutheran Church *Rowland, PA*
 Hope Lutheran Church *Hampton, VA*
 Mountain View Lutheran Church *Thornton, CO*
 St. Paul Lutheran Church *Otis, CO*
 Ascension Lutheran Church *Ames, IA*
 Ascension Lutheran Church *Waterloo, IA*
 Faith Lutheran Church *Holstein, IA*
 Hope Lutheran Church *Brighton, IA*
 Pilot Knob Lutheran Church *Forest City, IA*
 Prince of Peace Lutheran Church *Evansdale, IA*
 Redeemer Lutheran Church *West Union, IA*
 St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church *Traer, IA*
 St. Paul Lutheran Congregation *Tripoli, IA*
 Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church *Ellis, KS*
 St. John's Lutheran Church *Pocahontas, MO*
 Mighty Fortress Ev. Lutheran Church *Seward, NE*
 Grace Lutheran Church *Nunda, SD*
 Lake Madison Lutheran Church *Rutland, SD*
 Bible Lutheran Church *Dodge Center, MN*
 Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church *St. Paul, MN*
 Christ Lutheran Church *Duluth, MN*
 Grace Ev. Lutheran Church of Deephaven *Wayzata, MN*
 Christ Lutheran Church *Chetek, WI*
 Christ Lutheran Church *Chippewa Falls, WI*
 Clam Falls Lutheran Church *Frederic, WI*
 Community Lutheran Church *Wausaukee, WI*
 Kongsvinger Lutheran Church *Oslo, MN*
 New Hope Lutheran Church *Newfolden, MN*
 Poplar Lake Lutheran Church *Fosston, MN*
 Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church *Sidney, MT*
 Trinity Lutheran Church *Galata, MT*
 American Lutheran Church *Mandan, ND*
 Faith Lutheran Church *Columbus, ND*
 First Evangelical Lutheran Church *Parshall, ND*
 Light of Christ Lutheran Church *Williston, ND*
 Lucky Mound Lutheran Church *Ryder, ND*
 Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church *Williston, ND*
 Abiding Grace Lutheran Church *Gillette, WY*
 Sonland Lutheran Church *Casa Grande, AZ*
 Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church *Frazier Park, CA*
 Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church *Galt, CA*
 Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran *Yuba City, CA*
 St. Luke the Evangelist Lutheran Church *Jurupa Valley, CA*
 St. Peter's Lutheran Church *Elk Grove, CA*
 Trinity Lutheran Church *San Pedro, CA*
 Christ the Ray of Hope Lutheran Church *Albuquerque, NM*
 The Barn Again Lutheran Church *Cedar Crest, NM*
 Elim Lutheran Church *Brush Prairie, WA*
 Emmanuel Lutheran Church *Bremerton, WA*

A Stable & A Cross

No Hallmark Card Images!

by Rev. Irvin F. Stapf, Pastor Emeritus, Christ Lutheran, Germantown, MD

The theme for this Evangel issue is personal prayer and worship. Coming at this time of year, it prepares us for the supreme act of God's intervention in human life. Forecasters will describe destructive weather events as "acts of God." Far surpassing them all is Emmanuel, God with us! Almighty God, Creator of the heavens and the earth, Author and Sustainer of all that exists physical and spiritual. This God, our God, humbled Himself, took on human flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, was born of a woman in like manner as we all are. Almighty God demonstrated His unfathomable depth of love for mankind, for you and for me, by becoming one with us. This gives us much that should stir us deeply, humbling us in awe and worship. This is the awe and worship expressed in the 8th Psalm. It is a truth that opens our hearts to our gracious Lord.

Scripture assures us that the reason God became man was to redeem His fallen creation. The Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter events cannot be separated. We are humbled in worship as we witness again the suffering our Lord went through to gain salvation for mankind whom He had created. He made us to share the beauty and good of His own life. Yet we rebelled. That rebellion has caused untold amounts of pain in human life. If we were not going to be eternally separated from God, He would have to make it possible. We were and are incapable of redeeming ourselves. It would take our Lord's suffering, and a sacrifice beyond our comprehension. It would take a Stable and a Cross.

His work and sacrifice are a marvel every time we hear our pastor, who stands before us in the stead of Christ Himself say, "I declare unto to you the entire forgiveness of all of your sins." With those words, and the visible evidence we receive with His true Body and Blood in the Communion, we know that the temple curtain separating us from our Holy God has been torn from top to bottom. We are allowed to stand before our absolutely holy and perfect God in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

It is this truth of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that alone can change hearts and lives through faith in His Name. The Good News of our redemption was gained at great cost and pain to God Himself. It has been costly to those our Lord has called to proclaim it,

as well as to those who have accepted it through faith (see Acts 9:16).

As I've taught Scripture over the years, I've tried to read our own lives, into the life situation of those our Lord has used to bring us His truth. Meditating on the human reality of their lives as they sought to be obedient to their Lord's call, deepens our own prayers, worship, and thanksgiving.

The Nativity of our Lord Jesus was not a Hallmark event. Jesus' birth didn't take place in a pristine manger setting illuminated by a heavenly glow. It was in a stable with all the normal animal smells and muck. Mary, likely in her mid-teens, felt fear, felt every labor contraction, while her betrothed frantically sought the town's midwife. And men, sometime ask the moms among us how they would have liked a five day journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem riding on a donkey's back while in their 9th month, and carrying her first child? Certainly not the stuff for a Hallmark card.

Most of us have heard or read medical accounts of a crucifixion. A horrible and slow death! That teenage Mary, now in her late 40s, stood near that Roman cross clinging to John. This was the disciple to whom Jesus, with what weak breath He had left, put her into his care. Mary watched her son die, and felt the sword aged Simeon had foretold, pierce deeply into her being. Mary wept as her firstborn took His last breath.

I'm certainly not accurate in every aspect of this scenario. But this is the real human life our Lord has used to bring us into His life. In the process the lives of Mary, Joseph, Jesus' disciples, and countless others to our present day have been molded and changed eternally. That is the work of the Potter. You and I are the clay. It is a process ordained by our Father in the fullness of His love, His perfect wisdom, His gracious patience, and His deepest understanding of the needs of each human heart.

Beginning to see our own lives in this light of God's grace, can only humble us and bring us to worship our Holy Lord. He has promised never to leave or forsake us. He will complete our beautiful vessel He has designed for heavenly use.

Words we can trust: Jeremiah 18:1-6; 29:11; 31:3, and Romans 8:38-39

Ordination & Installation of The Rev. Michael Callahan

by Duane Kleven

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me." –Jesus of Nazareth

The Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins officiated the Service of Ordination and Installation for Pastor Michael Callahan with the assistance of The Rev. David Huskamp, Sunday, September 13, 2020 at First Evangelical Lutheran & Lucky Mound Lutheran Churches, Parshall, North Dakota.



Pastor Callahan served as Vicar for 12 months while he completed his seminary education and continued as Vicar while waiting for a call to Word and Sacrament Ministry. The congregations at First Evangelical Lutheran & Lucky Mound Lutheran Churches through prayerful consideration, called Vicar Callahan to be their Shepherd and Pastor.

The Rev. Dr. Leins delivered the sermon The Good Shepherd, emphasizing the roll of Pastor is to be the shepherd and caretaker of their flock.



So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." —John 10:7–18



Photos by Duane Kleven

A Strategic Ministry Plan That Made A Difference! (And Didn't Get Thrown into The Circular File)

by Richard J. Gladon and Rev. Roger J. Twito

Ascension Lutheran Church, Ames, Iowa

Background

It's hard to get someplace new when you don't have a map to direct you.

Ascension Lutheran Church in Ames, Iowa, was established officially in 1965. In 1992, our church instituted a Planning Committee to explore what we needed to do with our property in Downtown Ames. The church and its associated buildings were becoming a black hole for the church's money, and we were not able to get much momentum for doing God's work. After two years of looking at what seemed like every possibility, the Committee recommended the church sell all its properties and establish a new church campus on the edge of town that was growing by leaps and bounds. However, our congregation was not ready to move, and the work of the Committee was shelved for about five years. Our timing was not God's timing.

After funding several major maintenance projects, our congregation now was ready to move, and we purchased seven acres on the north edge of town in 1997. The former Planning Committee was now reinstated and renamed the Vision Committee. From 1997 to 2010, we conducted several capital campaigns, and in 2011, we began construction on our new church campus. Our first service was on March 4, 2012, twenty years after the formation of the original Planning Committee. We all accepted that God's timing was not our timing, and His timing would prevail.

The new building contained the sanctuary, a narthex that functions as our fellowship area, church offices, and several Christian education classrooms. We soon adjusted to our new surroundings, and our church grew both in numbers and spirituality. By 2014, we were running out of space, and something needed to be done soon. A portable classroom building (three 12' by 70' units connected side-by-side) became available from another church in town, and we moved it to our site. In 2014, we also reorganized the Vision Committee into the Site Development Committee, and its charge was to develop the remainder of our church campus. We contracted with the same architectural firm that designed

our church and asked them to devise a master plan. We were very enthusiastic about this master plan, and it included two more buildings that were larger than our new church building.

Soon, it became apparent we were wandering around and speculating too much about our growth and what kind of church we wanted to be. We were not looking at who we were and where we wanted to head over the next several years. Our church leaders identified that what we really needed to do first was develop a strategic ministry plan. That plan would give us direction so that we could become the church God wanted us to be, and at the same time, do work for Him that He would guide and protect.

Setting the Groundwork for a Strategic Ministry Plan

In early 2015, our Church Council approved the funds for us to contract with a pastor and church consultant, Rev. Paul Sorenson, who has expertise in helping congregations develop strategic plans. Preliminary projects included development of a Strategic Planning Committee and distribution of a survey to as many members as possible to help the Committee crystallize who we were, before we began trying to develop a plan for where we wanted to go, and how we were to get there.

The Strategic Planning Committee was reorganized from the original Site Development Committee, and it consisted of about nine members. That Committee laid all the groundwork for a strategic planning retreat that would pull in representatives from all ministries and programs of the church, e.g., the Christian Education Committee, the Property Committee, our "Seasoned Saints (those who are 55+)," etc.

The Retreat

The entire strategic planning retreat consisted of about 30 members, so that all facets of the church were represented. Advice before advocacy was the tenet here. A day and a half in late October were scheduled for the

retreat. Our first project was to determine how the strategic ministry plan would be structured. The plan was divided into four major parts: Our Identity; Our Congregation and Community Needs; Our Goals and Strategies; and Our Next Steps. Out of that retreat, and with the addition of several assigned pieces, a strategic ministry plan was drafted. After eight(!) revisions, we finally had a document to take to the Church Council and the Congregation for their approvals and to get an ok to commence work on this new plan. The strategic ministry plan was approved by the Congregation in August of 2016 as a five-year plan. This year (2020) we are starting the process again, so that we can develop a strategic ministry plan for 2021 to 2026. Our 2016 to 2021 plan has guided us to levels we were not sure we could attain previously, but it has served us really well in our endeavor to become the church God wants us to be.

The Six Goals

Goal #1: Strengthen outreach opportunities locally and throughout the world.

Goal #1A: Stronger outreach in our community first, followed by broader outreach.

Goal #1B: Increase our presence and work with missions nationally and internationally.

Goal #2: Double total annual offerings received to \$1,040,000 by December 31, 2020, to develop and support Ascension's giving for community outreach and missions to 50% of ALC's total income, pay off the mortgage, fund an emergency cash reserve fund, and a major maintenance fund.

Goal #3: Enhance youth ministry by increasing the number of middle-school and high-school youth involved in youth ministry activities (15 in January 2016) by 100% (to 30 by January 2019).

Goal #4: Over the next three years, study and implement facilities improvements that would assist with the youth program at the church.

Goal #5: Strengthen our worship arts ministry by featuring special worship music at least one time per month, starting Easter of 2016.

Goal #6: Create/maintain an active Christian bond among the members of Ascension's church family that results in a sense of belonging—caring for, serving one another, and building up one another in Christ's love.

We rejoice in how God has used the original strategic ministry plan to give us guidance and direction, and we pray His Holy Spirit will inspire the development of our second strategic ministry plan to the glory of God's name and furthering of His kingdom. (Prov. 3:5-6)





Photo by Rev. Chris Rosebrough

140 Years Old with New Horizons

Kongsvinger Lutheran Church, Rural Oslo, MN

By Don Mathsen

On November 21, 2020, the Kongsvinger Lutheran Church of rural Oslo, MN, will be 140 years old. Standing alone on the prairie between the communities of East Grand Forks, Alvarado and Oslo, MN, the congregation looks back at the many changes that have taken place over the years. At the same time, it is experiencing one of the most unique times in all of its history as a result of the COVID pandemic and the digital technology that enables discipleship education and worship with a global audience.

Country churches in the Upper Midwest were often formed by pioneer families who had migrated together and shared the same spiritual and cultural identities. On November 21, 1880, twenty-five pioneer families and individuals signed the Kongsvinger charter. Many came from the border region of eastern Norway and western Sweden known as Finnskogen—an area to which families from the Savonia region of Finland migrated beginning in the late 16th century.

Through the years, the church served as a spiritual and social center for families within a 5-mile radius with most of the congregation membership descendant from founding families. In 2007, a congregational survey demonstrated that without new membership the Kongsvinger church would, like many other small country churches, die out in 15-20 years. Many of the younger generation were departing the area or had left the congregation. The survey posed the question, “Was the small rural church still needed?”

At its founding, Kongsvinger was affiliated with the Haugean Movement in Norway with its emphasis on personal piety and lay leadership. Through the years, the congregation has gone through the progression of mergers of Norwegian Lutheran churches in America. This led to a number of different local parish affiliations with other Lutheran churches throughout the area. In 1989, the congregation, without other local parish relationships, affiliated with The American Association of Lutheran Churches a conservative Lutheran body whose first Presiding Pastor was the Rev. Duane Lindberg, a native of rural East Grand Forks and a UND graduate. This affiliation continues to the present.

Kongsvinger's longest serving pastor over its 140-year history was Pastor Harvey Hoiberg who served the congregation for 17 years from 1997-2014.

In 2014, Pastor Chris Rosebrough was called to be the 23rd pastor of Kongsvinger. Having formed Pirate Christian Radio, an online Christian network and discernment ministry, Pastor Rosebrough was soon sought out by some of his radio audience to provide a congregational setting in which they could receive counseling and instruction in the historic Christian doctrines of the early church and the Reformation. To meet this demand, Kongsvinger hosted the formation of its Aletheia Outreach program that began offering two Saturday online worship services at times suitable for audiences in North America, Western Europe, and Australia and the Far East. Later, online midweek adult catechism classes were launched for anyone who desired more in-depth Biblical instruction.

The concept of "online church" was initially met with skepticism by many pastors and laymen as a distraction from how a congregation should function. However, the five years of experience prior to 2020 allowed Pastor Rosebrough and Kongsvinger to move into the pandemic shut-down era without missing any Sundays or educational



Old church before 1917 remodeling.

Photo Retouched by Duane Kleven

activities. The result was that participation blossomed.

For several decades, the Kongsvinger congregation consisted of 40-50 active members, or about 20 family units. Since mid-March, 2020, over 300 individual IP addresses have registered in attending one or more Kongsvinger services. Since July, about 80 family units faithfully attend one or more worship, devotional and educational sessions each week. These include three catechism classes on Thursday, men's and women's Bible studies on Saturday morning, two international Aletheia worship services on Saturday afternoon, and the Sunday morning Service and Bible Study from Kongsvinger.

In 1880, Norwegian and Swedish were the languages of the church. Today, it is again possible to hear participants converse in Norwegian and Swedish. Other regular participants come from Australia, Barbados, Canada, Finland, Netherlands, S. Korea, United Kingdom, and several African countries. In several cases, new local churches are being formed in some of these countries as outgrowths of the Aletheia Program.

As Kongsvinger commemorates 140 years of history, God seems to be answering the 2007 question. No longer constrained by the demographics of a rural community, the small rural church appears to have found a new role. No longer a "family chapel" for descendants of the pioneers, it has truly become a church that is fulfilling the command of Christ to, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). What the future holds, only God knows.

Kongsvinger Lutheran Church is physically located at 15950 470th Ave NW Oslo, Minnesota 56744. In-person Divine Worship and Sunday School for all ages begins at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings. For information on how to attend Kongsvinger via livestream, please call our church office at 218-773-8137 or visit us at either our website www.kongsvingerchurch.org or on our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Kongsvinger.AALC.USA/>



Old church interior. *Photo Retouched by Duane Kleven*

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Come and See

*A Lutheran Mission Agency is Having an Impact,
One Life at a Time, on Abortions in Vietnam*

by The Rev. Bill Moberly

Global mission is still the command of our Risen Lord, despite a global pandemic. Because global needs and opportunities are often thousands of miles, many time zones and cultures away from us, taking time to 'come and see' what the Lord is doing can take the form of a short term mission trip—or in times like these—reading an article and visiting a website to learn about something that is outside your day to day life.

Taking the life of even one unborn child is one life too many—whether here in the US, or in communist countries like Russia or China. Over many years, my wife and I have ministered in these two communist countries. Now, by God's grace, we are actively engaged through ALWM International in Southeast Asia in a variety of ways, including ministry to rescue the unborn. In Vietnam, where our indigenous staff and volunteers reach out, there are some heartbreaking statistics.

About 40 percent of all pregnancies in Vietnam end in abortion, twice as many as the government's official records, doctors from Hanoi's Central Obstetrics Hospital said in a report. Every woman of reproductive age undergoes 2.5 abortions on average, according to the report.

"Vietnam has one of the highest [abortion] rates in the world. It is just sad," Dr. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Phuong, a seasoned obstetrician, said at a recent workshop on contraception and reproductive health services.*

The Ho Chi Minh City-based Tu Du Hospital, the largest obstetrics hospital in southern Vietnam, said abortion numbers are continuing to rise. At one point, it was so alarming that the reported abortion ratio to live birth at the hospital was 1:1.

What can we do? The heart of our ALWM International and our Vital Links medical/evangelism ministry in Vietnam is

Dr. Hang, whose vision for the lost, for better healthcare for the poor, and for protecting the unborn is reflected in the ongoing outreach that continues through the year! Rural medical clinics are held regularly with our partner churches to serve their communities, build relationships and share the Gospel. Her passion for protecting the unborn, along with another key volunteer I can't name for security reasons, has led them to share their faith, lead pregnant, unwed mothers to Christ, and urge these young women to choose life! These two warriors, with a handful of others on the team, have together seen more than 270 children rescued over the past 12 years!

Of those 270+, about 35 have not been kept by the birth mothers, but have been given to our staff to raise. These beautiful children live in 3 of what we call our "Gospel Houses." These are unofficial orphanages or 'group homes' with parents who raise them as their own. They are given life, lots of love, and a future and hope with an education, and are raised in Christian homes to walk with Christ. I have visited two of the three, and even that was challenging in order to not breach security. They currently range in age from 4 to 17, and we are at capacity in these locations. We just completed a fourth home 2 hours outside of Ho Chi Minh City. More babies are on the way! This article can't show pictures of the parents or many of the children, but I do share them as I travel and speak, and through our ministry newsletter. We welcome your prayers for our team, the children, and our partner churches there. You can find out more about how to partner with us in the work of ALWM International, including our pro-life and orphan ministry, and our new leper outreach, by visiting ALWM.org or write me at missionshelp@alwm.org. Consider partnership with this life changing ministry working in the 10/40 Window, with 87 Unreached people groups and just 2% of the population is evangelical Christian.

*Footnote: <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/abortion-rate-in-vietnam-highest-in-asia-3476746.html>

Rev. Bill Moberly is a Pastor of TAALC serving in Global Missions. He is the Founder & Director of Awakening Lives to World Missions.

ALWM is the only Lutheran mission mobilization organization in North America. ALWM exists to "call, mobilize, equip and network congregations to actively respond to Jesus' command to take the Gospel to the nations." Pastor Moberly founded ALWM in 2007, and expanded the ministry in 2015. He previously served as Director of East European Mission Network (EEMN) (2004-2015). Before serving fulltime in global missions, he pastored Lutheran congregations in California, Illinois & Minnesota. He also was associate professor at the Bible Institute of Hawaii (at that time a ministry of Lutheran Bible Institute, Seattle) in the early 1980's.

Beloved Apprentice: Becoming a House of Prayer

by Sue DeSha

*"Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary pure and holy, tried and true.
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for You."*

The AALC Women of L.I.F.E. Bible Study for 2021 is entitled *Beloved Apprentice: Becoming a House of Prayer* and written by Sue DeSha of Christ Lutheran Church in Duluth, Minnesota. The monthly study is a word and prayer workshop for women who want to grow in their relationship with God and with each other in a small group setting. One special feature of the study is its flexibility. If you don't complete a lesson together, it can easily be finished at home as a personal devotional.

Each lesson introduces prayer mentors from the historical church and the Old and New Testaments to set the stage and followed by the workshop portion that includes scripture passages, related questions, opportunities for discussion and shared observations, all leading to the writing of scriptural prayers from the heart and a time of corporate prayer.



Here are the lessons and our prayer mentors:

- January – Becoming a House of Prayer
- February – How to Interpret Scripture and Lessons from the School of Prayer
- March – The Holy Trinity: Praying Our Creation, Fall and Redemption
- April – Moses: Loving and Praying God's Law
- May – David: Psalms of Repentance
- June – Jesus Christ: The God Who Prays for Us
- July – Hannah: Pouring Out Our Soul
- August – Esther: Standing in the Breach
- September – Miriam or Mary: Choosing the Better Way
- October – Paul: Praying for the Church
- November – Martin: Prepare to Die
- December – The Puritans: The Valley of Vision

May God's Word and Spirit be at work in you as you enjoy this study in 2021!

If you are interested in ordering, please contact Laurie O'Brien at lauriedapelo@gmail.com, and see www.taalc.org for an order form.

Meet a Seminarian: Chad Zimmerman

Where are you from?

I'm from Denver, Colorado but have spent most of my adult life back and forth from Denver to Fukuoka, Japan.

How did you hear about The AALC?

I was an independent missionary in Japan studying the language and culture full-time when I discovered Pirate Christian Radio. It led to my leaving the Assemblies of God both at home and at the current church I was serving in Japan, Hakata New Life Church, due to some irreconcilable and egregious issues that I could not come to terms with.



The problem was that Christians are less than a percentage point of the population, and most of those Christians are centralized in Nagasaki and Tokyo, respectively. I was in Fukuoka, a massive city of millions, but with only three or four functioning churches. There was a Lutheran church, but I quickly found out it was an ELCA affiliate and the teaching was riddled with the teachings that made me leave my last church. I was two hours from the nearest confessional church by train. So I contacted Rev. Chris Rosebrough (of Pirate Christian Radio, and TAALC pastor) and he suggested that I talk to The AALC about what to do.

What church are you a part of?

I'm the proud Vicar and local "Sem-rat" of Mountain View Lutheran Church in Thornton, Colorado!

What do you do for work now?

I'm a full time YouTuber and have been for six years. I make videos helping the next generation go to Japan, learn its language, and appreciate its culture.

Things you're interested in, or passionate about:

I recently started translating ancient works in Japanese, English and Russian for extra seminary support, and also want to translate all the Ante-Nicene fathers into Japanese and Russian (most of which would be for the first time) before I graduate as a fun side project!

Confess and Be Cleansed

by the Rev. Dr. Jordan Cooper

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9, NKJV)

This text may sound familiar to many of you, as it is often recited at the beginning of the Divine Service as part of the rite of Confession and Absolution. This is done because the promise included here is so important that it deserves to be heard each week. Or, more accurately, each day of our lives. These two short verses are packed with two of the most significant truths of the Christian faith: first, that we are sinners, and second, that God forgives our sins.

Part of the Christian faith is the acknowledgment that we have sin. We are born as children of Adam, and as such, we have inherited from him a sinful nature. Selfishness is a part of who we are, even from the womb (Ps. 51:5). This sinful nature works itself out in our thoughts, words, and deeds. There is no one, save Christ himself, who has lived a sinless life. We all have hateful thoughts, hurtful words, and selfish actions.

Nearly everyone acknowledges this in some sense, but we tend to downplay the seriousness of that reality. People confess, "I'm only human," or "I made a mistake." Using such language is to do exactly what John says here: to engage in self-deception. We know the reality of our situation, but we lie to ourselves to feel less guilty. According to God's Word, sin is not a mere mistake, or something to take lightly. Sin is a violation of the perfect and holy law of the only true God. You offend his justice, glory, and honor every time you break his precepts. God would be perfectly just to take out his wrath on us forever because of such violations. This is not true merely of the unbeliever, but sin is a daily reality even for Christians.

John reminds us here that confessing the truth of Christ also means confessing the truth about us. If we confess him as Savior, we simultaneously confess ourselves to be in great need. This is echoed in the words of the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus calls us to ask for forgiveness as we extend forgiveness to others (Matt. 6:13). If the model prayer includes our asking for forgiveness, this means that we are continually in need of forgiveness. Though we battle against sin by the power of God's Spirit, and we are sometimes brought victories over our struggles, the sin-nature is with us until we are delivered from this body of death at the resurrection (Rom. 7:24). This means that confession of our sins before God is to be part of the pattern of daily life.

The beauty of this text from 1 John is that this confession also leads to absolution. Note that John does not put any qualifications in front of this promise. He simply says: "If we confess," then God "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." John does not write: "If your repentance is sincere enough," or "if you shed enough tears," or "provided you do a lot better next time." God's forgiveness comes with no strings attached. It is totally and absolutely free. You are forgiven. You are covered with the perfect righteousness of God's own Son, Jesus Christ.

While this forgiveness does not cost us anything, it did cost God a whole lot. It cost the life of His Son. In Christ's death, that holiness and justice that you have offended in your sin was satisfied through the crucified body of Jesus. Yet God thought that the price was worth it. If God was so willing to suffer so much just for your sake, He is certainly willing to forgive your sins. In fact, God is more than simply willing. He delights in forgiving you. Forgiveness is what God does. He loves it, and He loves you.

Receive that forgiveness daily, as God continually offers it to you. Come to Him in sincere sorrow and repentance, and He will forgive. He will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. He will bring you the blessings of eternal life.

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