

The EVANGEL

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Letter From the Editor

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and savior! In this edition, we explore the Reformation even further. My hope is that you will see just how applicable the Reformation is to today.

We have recently entered the church season of Pentecost. This is the season of growth, of learning, of spreading the Good News that has been entrusted to us. Pentecost is the longest church season, symbolizing the age we now live in: the age of the church. This being the most “uneventful” of church seasons, of course, does not absolve us from church attendance (it is summer, after all!), but instead calls us to be engrafted even more into the community of believers. Paul writes:

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God the Spirit.” (Eph. 2:19-22, NKJV)

We have been made into the dwelling place of God. We, the church, have received the Spirit and are brought together in unity to love and serve God and our neighbor. We are no longer incompatible individuals put together in a church building, but we have been made into a holy nation, a family. The foundation upon which we are built is the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ who died to atone for our sins, who raised from the dead to win us new life. Without this foundation, the church cannot stand. The message that we have been buried and raised with Christ, that we have received His inheritance, was truly the basis of the Reformation. Heaven is not acquired by our money spent, or our holy actions committed (as the belief was in the Roman church at Martin Luther’s time), but rather by faith in Jesus. Let us bind ourselves together in our communities, serving one another in love, learning the truths of the scriptures, and trusting that in Jesus Christ, we have been made one.

In Christ,
Lisa Cooper

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A Spectator Sport

Imagine, if you would, a worship service that is designed much like a sporting event. Enter the superstar, the embodiment of strength with style. Assisted by several supporting players, this Most Valuable Player performs virtually all of the “action” that takes place. The occasion is enhanced by inspiring music, performed by talented singers and musicians. The arena is filled with spectators. But, these onlookers know that they have no active part to play. They have come only to observe and appreciate the actions of those more gifted than themselves.

You may think that I am writing about a contemporary television evangelist or a popular megachurch minister. I am not. I am writing about worship in the late Middle Ages, just prior to the Lutheran Reformation. Still, I think that there are some clear similarities between today’s entertainment-driven religious experience and Christian worship in the early 16th century.

In Luther’s day, the situation for the average Christian worshiper was worse than simply being a passive observer of the Catholic Mass. We must remember that the service of worship was not conducted in his or her own language. The service was in Latin, so the average German worshiper literally did not know what was being said. He or she could not participate by speaking the liturgy or singing the hymns. Moreover, the Holy Scripture was not yet translated into

German, so he or she could not even know the message that was supposed to be delivered.

The result of centuries of worship without Scripture or sound doctrine was the establishment and maintenance of a superstitious population that did not know the Word of God and did not trust the mercy of Christ. Instead, they feared the judgment of God and awaited His divine punishment. They believed that the clergy were the spiritual elite, like especially gifted athletes. But, the laity were the spiritually inferior, whose place was to observe from a spectator’s distance the events of divine worship. For them, religion was an endless list of sins to be avoided and good works to be performed with only death and judgment awaiting them.

A Reformation of Worship

The reforms that Luther brought to Christian worship were nothing short of astounding. It is as if he walked into a room that was as black as night, and switched on the light! The first change that Luther made to Christian worship was to hold every word in the Divine Liturgy accountable to Holy Scripture. Most of the components of Divine Worship were already taken directly from the Bible. For example, the Kyrie (Lord, Have Mercy), Gloria in Excelsis (Glory in the Highest), Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy), Agnus Dei (Lamb of God), and Nunc Dimittis (Now Let Depart) came directly from God’s Word. However, the prayers and proclamations that surrounded Holy

Communion in the Roman Catholic Mass did not come directly from Holy Scripture. Luther changed the consecration of the Lord's Supper to conform exactly with God's Word. In this way, the Holy Communion could no longer be misinterpreted as an act of the priest offering Christ to God, but was rightly understood as an act of God giving Christ to each believing worshiper.

The next reform that Luther made was to translate the Holy Bible and the Divine Worship Service into the language of the people. Gutenberg's Printing Press made Luther's publications accessible and affordable. Suddenly, everyone, everywhere was able to receive the message of God's Word for him or herself. This was an unimaginable change. God's life-giving and saving Word spoke directly to human hearts and minds, creating faith and teaching God's truth. In addition, Luther wrote a large number of new hymns that taught exactly why Jesus had come and what Jesus had done in order to bring love, mercy, and salvation to all people, by grace through faith. Luther used well-known tunes and common language to tell the truth of the Gospel of Jesus.

Thirdly, Luther restored to worship the primacy of Word and Sacraments. The Divine Liturgy has two high points: the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the Sacrament. Luther restored the importance of the preaching of God's Word as Law and Gospel, and clarified that the chief article of the faith is that humanity is justified by grace through faith apart from works of the Law. Also, Luther declared that the Sacrament of the Altar is God's gift of the true body and blood of Jesus, for the forgiveness of sins and resurrection to eternal life, for all who believe Christ's words, "Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins" (See Luther's Small Catechism: *The Sacrament of the Altar*).

Finally, Luther clarified the definition of the church, the power of the laity, and the purpose of the clergy. In short, the church is the assembly of believers where the Word of God is rightly taught and the Sacraments are administered in their purity. For this purpose, God has instituted the Holy Ministry, so that through the Word and Sacraments, as instruments, the Holy Spirit may create faith and justify unto eternal life those who believe. All believers are part of God's holy priesthood; each one has a vocation of service that is completely acceptable to God. Clergy are no better saints and no worse sinners than all the rest of God's redeemed. However, the ordained have been called by God and

His church for the purpose of rightly preaching and teaching the Word of God and administering His Holy Sacraments in their purity. The clergy serve Christ and His church as spiritual shepherds, with authority and responsibility prescribed in Holy Scripture. For this reason, they are given a stricter judgment and held to account before God's throne for the souls in their keeping (See *Augsburg Confession: Articles IV-VIII*, James 3:1 and Hebrews 13:17).

A Message for Today

Today, it is still possible to find churches that function like arenas of spectators, with seats for distant observers. It is possible to find those who consider themselves to be spiritual superstars, who enjoy the adulation of the crowd and believe in their own spiritual superiority. Even in this age of information at our fingertips, there are still those who do not know what the Bible teaches and those who are false teachers in the Name of Christ.

The lessons of the Reformation, therefore, are just as relevant today as they were 500 years ago, and the teaching of the great Reformer is just as much needed today as it was then. The American Association of Lutheran Churches makes no apology for accepting and believing in the Bible as the infallible, inerrant Word of God. We encourage all of our members to have regular, daily devotions and to read the Scriptures for strength of faith and guidance in life. Moreover, we are proud of our heritage of liturgical worship, knowing that its roots are found in the Last Supper liturgy of Jesus with His disciples. We rejoice that worship is the assembly of believers whom God has called, gathered, enlightened, sanctified, and kept in the one true faith. In worship, God feeds His people with His Holy Word and precious Sacraments which we receive with shouts of joy and declarations of faith.

For this reason, we do not worship as spectators who are far removed from the real action of God. No! We are active participants, fully engaged on the field of God's mighty salvation victory. In the Divine Service, Christ comes to us and does *God to us!* Through His Word and Sacraments, God acts directly upon us. We are restored, revived, and renewed. As redeemed children of God, the promises of Christ are applied to us, and by grace through faith, we are forgiven and forever His! Hallelujah!

People of the Reformation

By The Rev. Jordan Cooper

In honor of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, we are doing a short series of articles on some of the most important figures of that great event. In the previous issue, we looked at three theologians who impacted the life of the church in the sixteenth century, including: Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, and Johannes Bugenhagen. In this issue, our series continues with three people who impacted Luther's life and legacy. They are: Johann von Staupitz, Katharina Von Bora, and Prince Frederick the Wise. Without these three figures, the Reformation would likely not have been the success that it was.

Johann von Staupitz

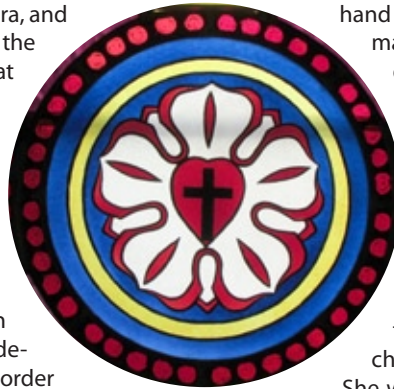
Among all of the corruption that had spread into the church by the late medieval era, there were some bright beacons of light at that time. There continued to be pastors who cared for their people and pointed them to the love of Christ. One such faithful minister was Johann von Staupitz. Staupitz was born in 1460 in Motterwitz, Germany to parents of Czech descent. In 1485, he was accepted into the Augustinian order as a monk, and eventually would be made a prior (head of the monastery). He later got a doctorate in theology, and became dean of the theological faculty at the college in Wittenberg, where Luther would later teach. Staupitz passed away in the early years of the reformation in 1524.

While Staupitz never considered himself to be part of the reformation, his pastoral care of a young Augustinian monk was crucial to its success. When Martin Luther entered into the monastery, he was plagued with doubts about his own salvation and the reality of God's love. Staupitz, as a good pastor, continued to counsel the young man, and pointed him to the cross of Christ as the place where assurance was to be found. One should not simply look at God as an angry judge, but as a loving Father who sent his Son into this world to save his creation. This helped Luther to survive through the dark years of his life, and eventually helped him to discover the doctrine of justification by faith.

One of the most remarkable things about Staupitz is his unrelenting pastoral concern for his people. At one point, Luther confessed sins to his superior for six hours. Staupitz was always willing to listen and give counsel. Eventually, he would urge Luther to pursue academic studies, and this would lead to the writings which gave rise to the reformation. Though Staupitz did not accept all of the teachings of the reformation, his role as a pastor remained integral to Luther's life, and he continues to be an example to pastors today of how to properly care for afflicted consciences.

Katharina von Bora

The Reformation was a joint effort, not only of clergy, but also of laity and princes. Among those who impacted the church were several women involved in different aspects of Luther's reform work. One of the most significant women of the Reformation is the wife of Martin Luther, Katharina von Bora. Though not much detail is available about her early life, it is believed that Katharina was born around 1499, and was sent to a monastery for an education at a very young age. Since she had been a child when she had entered into the celibate life as a nun, she had not made a personal informed decision to enter into the religious life, and became dissatisfied with it. As Luther's writings began to spread throughout Germany in the 1520s, some of the nuns, including Katie, began to read his works, and were soon convinced of the truthfulness of his teaching. Several nuns desired to escape the convent, and they conspired together in order to leave. They did so by hiding in barrels, disguised as fish barrels, and eventually made their way to Luther in Wittenberg.



While Luther never rejected the celibate life as a God honoring one, he was convinced that such a life could not be forced upon people, nor should it be seen as somehow meriting one salvation before God. Thus, he believed that these nuns should be allowed, by their own decision, to leave this life and pursue marriage. Eventually all of the nuns were married with the exception of Katharina. She insisted that Martin Luther take her hand in marriage. While somewhat hesitant at first, they were married in 1525, and lived a happy life together until Luther's death in 1546.

In the Western church, it had been many years since pastors had been able to raise a family. Thus, Katie became a model of what a pastor's wife was called to be and to do. Among the many blessings of the Reformation was a return to the family life, and teaching surrounding the blessings that accompany marriage and child-rearing. Katharina continually supported her husband in his reform work, and encouraged him daily to continue pressing forward. She did this while raising six children and taking care of all of the normal household duties. She was often left alone due to Luther's travels. Katharina is an example to all faithful women today.

Prince Frederick the Wise

The success of the Reformation was due not only to theologians, but also to politicians. In God's providence, certain leaders were put in positions to protect Martin Luther and others who were involved in reform efforts. Luther was not the first reformer, as John Hus had made many similar arguments in the previous century. Yet, Hus was without political backing, and his life ended in martyrdom. Luther's life could have likely ended in the same manner, were it not for those politicians who were concerned for his well-being. Chief among those was Prince Frederick III, also known as Frederick the Wise.

Born in 1463, Frederick was one of the most significant political figures of the early sixteenth century. He received the office of elector in 1486, and served as a prince until his death in 1525. Frederick was a devoted Roman Catholic throughout most of his life, and he had one of the most impressive collections of relics in the Holy Roman Empire which pilgrims from all over Germany traveled to see and adore. Along with his devotion to the church, Frederick was also committed to education. In 1502, the prince founded the University of Wittenberg, which would later be the most important educational institution for the Reformation. Both Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon taught at the university. In 1517, one of Frederick's most popular professors became embroiled in a controversy over the issue of indulgences which would lead to his expulsion from the church.

When Martin Luther was challenged by the Vatican for his views, Frederick defended him. While initially the prince was not completely convinced by the doctrines taught by the reformer, he adamantly defended his right to teach them. Frederick soon became Luther's greatest ally. When the reformer was tried by the Roman Church, the prince used his influence to cause the meeting to occur in Germany, rather than in Rome. Following the Diet of Worms, Frederick arranged for Luther to be protected by a fake kidnapping, in order to avoid the possibility of martyrdom from the Inquisition. For the remaining years of his life, Frederick became more convinced of the truth of Luther's writings, and he used his influence to protect him. Without Frederick, it is likely that Luther would not have survived, and the Reformation may not have been successful. What Frederick teaches the church today is that God needs people in all positions in society in order to work for his purposes. Along with other laypeople, the prince was an essential part of God's work in the sixteenth century.



Church is an amazing thing: created by Jesus, yet made up of sinful humans. It is easy to overlook the essence of Church, especially when things aren't working like we would like them to. So, let's step back for a few minutes and consider what an amazing thing this is.

The Good: Jesus Christ Builds the Church

The Greek word for "church" only occurs in two places in the Gospels: Matthew 16 and Matthew 18. In Matthew 16, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (Matt. 16:13-14, CSB)

Certainly they were a worthy group of people for Jesus to be included with, but Jesus presses them for their own thoughts about who he is:

"But you," he asked them, "who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." (Matt. 16:15-16 CSB)

Peter moves beyond the accolades of the crowds, to confess who Jesus really is, the Messiah [Christ], the Son of the living God. Jesus accepts Peter's confession, while adding further to it.

Jesus responded, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven." (Matt. 16:17, CSB)

That is, for someone to realize who Jesus is means that only God could reveal it. On our own, any evaluation of Jesus will fall short. We miss who Jesus really is, and we miss what that means in terms of our salvation and the church.

Jesus not only acknowledges Peter's confession and shows him the basis for his confession, he extends it to be the basis of church.

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock [your confession] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." (Matt. 16:18, CSB, parenthetical added for clarity)

That is amazing—the good.

The Bad: The Church is Made Up of Sinners

The reality of the church is that church consists of sinners, and only sinners. It doesn't take us long to come to the realization that we are all sinners. We can mess things up in church. Sinners do sinful things, and it may be easy to spot the sin and sinner. The spotlight helps us identify the sinner, or at least we think it does. If only we could get rid of "those sinners" then church would be acceptable.

Jesus builds the church, and he knows exactly who the people of the church are: sinners. He is not surprised by it. Amazingly, Jesus still works in and through the church. Because sin is a persistent problem with sinners, even in the church, Jesus gives the keys to the kingdom to the Church (Matt. 16:19).

He does not leave the church to fend for itself. He builds the church and he cares for the church. Sin does not surprise Jesus. Rather, he anticipates that people in the church, sinners, will sin. Thus, in the other mention of "church" in the Gospels, Jesus provides the remedy for the church to continue to be the church.

[Jesus said:] "If your brother sins against you, go and rebuke him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he won't listen, take one or two others with you, so that by

the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established. If he doesn't pay attention to them, tell the church. If he doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like a Gentile and a tax collector to you. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven." (Matt. 18:15-18, CSB)

Sadly this process of dealing with sin is often ignored in the church. The church either thinks the sin will go away, or it hopes that it won't be noticed, "We don't want to ruffle feathers." Jesus knows that sin can only be dealt with by confronting and forgiving the sin.

By following these steps, the church can only do one of two things: bind the sin or loose (forgive) the sin. Note that in verse 18, in either case, the church declares what God has already declared: "whatever you bind on earth will



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have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven."

In other words, this is not the church acting as an independent organization for its own good. Rather, the declaration regarding sin is something that God has already determined, and the church speaks that (which will have been already bound/loosed in heaven). The church is not arbitrary in the announcement, but follows the lead of the One who builds the church.

The Beautiful: The Church Lives in Unity

Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus: "Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to live worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit

through the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:1-3, CSB)

He emphasizes that the church living together is not marked by a laundry list of things to do. Rather, the church exhibits the character of Christ: humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love. Elsewhere Paul describes these as "fruit of the Spirit." (Galatians 5:22-23)

It is amazing when the church begins to live out that reality. Humility means that the other person is more important than me. Gentleness means that I treat those who have been wounded, abused, shaken by sin, with the same gentleness Jesus demonstrated to people. For example: the woman at the well (John 4), the one caught in adultery (John 8), even Peter who

rightly confessed who Jesus is, and yet still denied Jesus. Bearing with one another in love means walking with another, those who struggles, those who live in fear, doubt, and anger.

The life of the church is guided by the one who built it. Note in Eph. 4:3 the church makes "every effort to keep the

unity of the Spirit." The church does not establish unity, only the Spirit can do that. But, the church does strive to maintain what the Spirit established. This is the outcome of the church rightly dealing with sin.

In our eyes, we see the church: battered, torn, weak, divisive. From that perspective it is tempting to walk away for church.

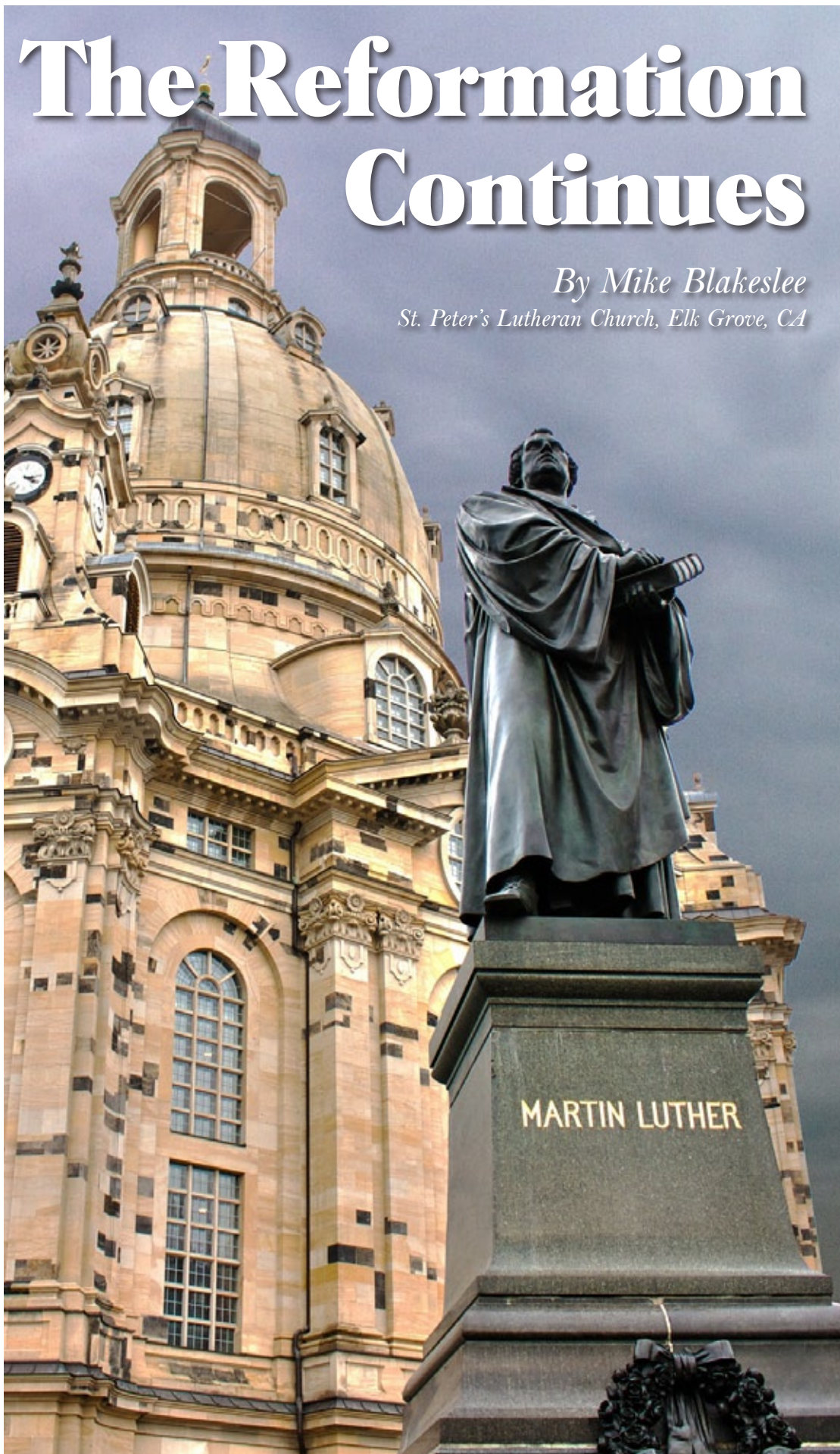
In Christ's eyes, he sees the church: forgiven, restored, and his voice in the world.

Walking away from church is not the answer. Being the church, as Jesus creates and sees the church means that we stay in the church. Broken sinners, forgiven. Weak, yet strong in love; bruised, but not abandoned. That's how Jesus intended the church to be. Christ's Church is amazing and beautiful.

The Reformation Continues

By Mike Blakeslee

St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Elk Grove, CA



The 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's momentous event will soon be upon us. As we ramp up to celebrate his unearthing and bringing to light the true means of our salvation, perhaps we should consider marking this date as a yearly event for all Christians to join in exalting God for giving us His written word. We celebrate Pentecost, don't we?

Jesus told the Samaritan woman in John 4:23 that an hour was coming "when true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth". The former is made possible by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, while the latter is greatly enhanced through God's written word. "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth." (John 17:17)

Consider the courage Martin Luther demonstrated in 1521 when he stood before the most powerful ruler in Europe since the Caesars of Rome. Dr. Luther understood that he could very well suffer an excruciating departure from life for his convictions to bear witness to the truth of God's written word, and in particular, the means Our Lord provided for reconciling to Himself the crowning glory of His creation—mankind. Luther's obsession to free millions of believers from the same anxiety he had previously suffered was surely born of the Holy Spirit. Before finding the truth of the gospel, did he not agonize over the uncertainty of whether or not he had earned enough "reward points" to escape God's eternal wrath? What Dr. Luther did that day when tried before the Holy Roman Emperor exemplified the greatest act of love as defined by Jesus Christ in John 15:13.

Bibles prior to the invention of the printing press were highly expensive to produce, making them difficult to acquire. Even so, it is very likely that any scholar reading passages such as Ephe-

sians 2:8-9 may have drawn the same conclusions Luther did. If they did understand that the Church was largely ignorant of the truth regarding the means provided for salvation, it is doubtful they could have conceptualized a remedy that might correct the errant thinking en-masse, or even consider an accomplishment of that magnitude possible.

The 6th century would see the last emperor to rule in the west. From Pope Gregory on, "his holiness" would serve in effect as *defacto* Roman emperor in the west, with their legions of priests distributed throughout these lands reminding the faithful masses of the fires of eternal damnation and how to escape them: obey Christ's vicar on earth...go to heaven. Fortunately, many of their flock abided in the provisions set forth in Romans 10:9, albeit most likely without fully understanding these as actual means for salvation. The pope could issue "fatwabs" (papal bulls), excommunicating those not in compliance with the "program," while offering a reduction in time spent in purgatory to any who might inflict pain and suffering on the offending perpetrator. In the case of errant rulers, the pope could encourage their political rivals to take by force territory and property they lorded over. This arrangement would help keep monarchs subservient to papal authority, and although helping force the peace within Christendom, it certainly restricted freedom of thought and with it, freedom of conscience.

It was for this very reason, Dr. Luther soon found himself in protective custody when returning from his audience with the Emperor. Confronted with having plenty of time on his hands, he translated the New Testament from Koine Greek into German. Now the common folk could corroborate for themselves from the word of God that Martin Luther was indeed preaching the truth. The Bible would not support the misnomer that the pope had the power to remove anyone from saving grace. He could not add time to a believer's stretch in purgatory, nor could he diminish it because there was no such thing as purgatory. This further undermined the popes' ability to intimidate the masses into obedience. The "emperor" had no clothes, and his house of cards would crumble in time.

Just how desperate was the papacy in keeping the masses from accessing God's written word? In 1535, William Tyndale was caught and later executed by agents of the Vatican when attempting to return to England. His crime: he had translated the Bible into English—with the help of Martin Luther—and sought to distribute it among his countrymen.

History is often unkind to Henry VIII whose father ended thirty years of internal strife in England upon wresting the crown for himself. (Henry VIII's excesses can be partly attributed to the fact that certain nobles boasted lineage giving them greater claim to the kingship. Without a male heir, Henry's death could have plunged the island nation into civil war again. Blessed are the peacemakers.) To help undermine the Vatican's power in England, Henry allowed his subjects to possess English versions of the Bible as long as they kept their opinions of what scripture revealed to themselves and not stir sentiment challenging the king's official position on spiritual matters. Without exerting his harsh measures to secure stability in his realm, his daughter Elizabeth never would have met with the success she achieved during her reign which saw the advancement of Protestantism

in England as well as the growth of Bible literacy among her subjects. One hundred years later, men like Sir Isaac Newton and Sir William Harvey were unhindered in their efforts to unveil the mysteries shrouding the laws God set down to govern His creation. Because of the Protestant Reformation, they could share their ideas and the results of their experiments freely without fear of suppression or reprisal by the myopic controlling elements within the papacy. This led to the rapid rise in the acquisition of scientific knowledge allowing for inventions and methods improving the quality of life while extending it as well.

Direct access to the Bible would allow for the rediscovery of principles lying dormant for centuries which would also allow for the rise of education, entrepreneurialism, commerce and banking (by identifying the difference between lending on fair terms and usury/loan sharking). These improvements would also contribute to the rise in longevity and quality of life.

By the mid 17th century, the die was cast considering that attempts (often violent) to return England to the fold of Catholicism had failed. Even so, the strife caused many Englishmen to set sail for the New World in hopes of pursuing greater religious freedom. This trend would help establish a bible-based culture on America's eastern seaboard. Their descendants would in time secure independence from Britain, and in the immediate wake undertake an experiment to establish freedom while recognizing it would only succeed for a people seeking God's guidance as provided through prayer and the Holy Bible.

On his tour of America in the 1830's, the French nobleman Alexis de Tocqueville observed, "Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power." Since its inception, the U.S. Constitution has continued to serve as the supreme law of the land, guaranteeing the unalienable rights that come from God—the God of the Bible. Objections to that truth quickly disintegrate when pointing out that the founders had the wisdom to place a Bible in every courtroom across America.

Immigration to America continues to represent a high compliment to the prevailing culture that has yielded prosperity, security and freedom—the very incentives which have drawn millions to come here. That they are products born of a Christian society rooted in biblical principles should never be forgotten, or that Martin Luther willingly risked his life to set them free.

In America, Catholics and Protestants would often times find themselves living side by side in harmony when learning that the other had neither horns nor spaded tail, but shared the same morality, and worshiped the same God. Learning that Protestants conducted their "masses" in English may have sparked the driving forces behind the Vatican's decision to allow their services to be conducted in the language spoken by the parishioners instead of using Latin.

Twenty years ago, a very serious petition with eight million signatures came before Pope John Paul II requesting that the aging pontiff issue a papal bull declaring Mary, the mother of Jesus, as part of the God-head. Roman Catholics protesting on the grounds that the Holy Scriptures failed to support such a proposal helped put that discussion to rest: one more example that the rippling effect Martin Luther set into motion 500 years ago in his effort to reform the entire Church that continues to this day.

MINISTRY IN NORTHERN ETHIOPIA

By The Rev. Dr. James Hoefler

Ethiopia has a larger population than Egypt, Iran or Turkey—more people than France, Great Britain or Italy. It is the 12th largest nation in the world, with over 100 million people and growing rapidly in one of the most fertile areas of the world. One of the world's oldest civilizations, it is also one of the world's poorest countries.



In May, I along with 3 other members of our Board, Pastor Doru Neamtu, Sergeant Charles (Smytty) Smith, and Negest Hagos, traveled to its rocky, hilly northern border area for an intensive campaign. While there we teamed with leaders of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (House of Jesus), one of the largest Lutheran Churches in the world. We brought new outfits, educational supplies, soccer balls and the Good News of Jesus to several orphanages. Our team met with over 500 believers in two functioning EECMY Churches inside the Shimelba Refugee Camp filled with escapees from Eritrea, who eluded armed patrols at night to get there. There are 40 men here approved for Theological Education there who lack the funds for their monthly classes! We provided crafts for kids, T-shirts for adults, a hot meal for everyone, along with sharing the power of the Gospel!

Northern Ethiopia has been a spiritual battleground since the first German Missionaries began their work here in 1830. Many times, Evangelicals have been forced out by Orthodox priests. Three years ago, the Lutheran Church at Aksum was burned down by a mob, with no consequence. However, pastor "T" continued his work by means of cell groups, and now has 100 university students and professors in his congregation. It was a privilege to fellowship with them while there. In the city of Adwa, we too were threatened with rocks while passing out tracts on the street, until local police came to protect us.

The Lutheran Church in Adwa occupies a prime site on the main highway. We experienced rich worship and fervent prayer. They also operate a school for 300 children, with a waiting list. One Saturday, we were able to offer a Gospel program to them, with a "two goat" lunch. Both Orthodox and Muslim parents attended, which according to pastors "B" and "Y" was historic! Negest our founder (who survived persecution escaping with her small children during the brutal communist's era), returned many years ago to found an orphanage in Adwa using rented facilities. We were encouraged to buy property with two buildings adjacent to the church for our own "House of Hope." Our Board will seek God's will in deciding to raise \$53,000 to purchase this land in the coming months. While there, we also built a chicken coop, and purchased 60 hens, so that our orphans will have more protein in their diet.

Our ministry also supports individuals thrown out on the street by their families. Fifteen years ago "K," a new mother of twin boys, became a follower of Jesus. Her Muslim husband divorced her, her stepfather tried to kill her, but today she is a deaconess in the Adwa church, and we are helping her obtain her Diploma in Seminary. Her sons hope to be a doctor and an engineer.

We ended our time offering a two day Training School for local pastors. I focused on Healthy Kingdom Leadership (using biblical examples of the six great temptations marring ministry relating to Call, Vision, Integrity, Team, Power and Risk-taking) while Doru, whose family suffered greatly during under communism in his native Romania while making converts of those who tormented them, significantly challenged these leaders to Bold Kingdom Leadership! We were invited many times to return next year, and we are confident the LORD will make it possible for us to do so if it is His will.

Dr. James Hoefler is President of the Board of Hope for Horn of Africa Ministries, Inc.



Don't Keep Your Faith a Secret

By Mary Koeberl Rechenberg

Are we spreading the gospel? How can I get the courage to talk about my faith and encourage others to come to church? It seems like a scary thing to do—just walk up to someone and talk about God? I can't do that!

However:

A recent encounter with a total stranger convinced me that it doesn't have to be scary to speak up about one's faith. I had made a quick trip to town to deliver eggs to the Safe House, buy groceries, etc. and was rushing to get home when I realized I had forgotten one of the items on my list. Thank goodness for the Dollar General Store a few miles from home. I quickly rushed through the store and up to the checkout counter, not paying any attention to the person ahead of me. As I exited the building the dark-haired lady ahead of me turned around, smiled, and said, "It is just beautiful around here, don't you think? It isn't anything like St. Louis. I just love the wide open spaces."

I agreed with her and replied that I really liked it, too. I had grown up in this area, it was home to me, and I planned to stick around.

Before I knew it we were involved in a friendly conversation that lasted at least ten minutes. Shoppers were coming and going all around us and still we talked on. She asked where I lived, how long I lived there, if I had family, what I did, and what things were special about this part of Missouri. When she asked if I was married, I revealed that I had lost two husbands, and that my second husband and I were only married seventy-three days when he died. She gave me a sympathetic look and asked the big question, "How in the world did you make it through that?"

I took a deep breath and replied, "I could not have made it through any of that without God and my faith."

"So you're saying surviving is all about faith?" she asked.

"Yes, it is for me. With God, my church, and my family I was able to survive and even be happy."

Of course, then she smiled and wanted to know all about my late husband. I had very little chance to get any information about her. I did manage to find out that she was from St. Louis and worked in advertising. We eventually shook hands and introduced ourselves, and I encouraged her to come back and visit my church anytime.

I realized later that I had done most of the talking. I had practically told my whole life's story to a total stranger—a person who had seemed genuinely interested in me—(the thought that she was a news reporter, or an interrogation expert from the CIA did cross my mind), but I really believe that this discussion was no accident. I believe it was an encounter orchestrated by God to teach me something about witnessing. You don't have to just walk up to someone and talk about God, sometimes they will walk up to you.

We have many opportunities where we can speak up about our faith, tell someone why prayer is important in our lives, and reveal the importance of going to church. The person sitting next to you in the doctor's office, the co-worker that is with you day in and day out, or even a fellow shopper could be hurting, scared, lonely, or just curious about the promise of God's peace and forgiveness.

Won't you join me in searching for these special moments when we can share our love of the Savior with others?



Kids Faith Club

by
Lori Leonard Reyman

"Join us! Worship God! You'll have a blast!" fifth-grader Jayley Endrulat exclaims as she describes Kids Faith Club at Faith Lutheran Church in Holstein, Iowa, one of The AALC's youngest congregations.

Every Wednesday during the school year, children in first through fifth grades are invited to participate in KFC, where they learn, pray and play at Faith Lutheran, a congregation in Northwest Iowa which started in September 2010.

Under the direction of Pastor Chris Schroder, his wife, Heidi, and six member volunteers and middle school helpers, an average of 20 youth gather each week after school to learn about Jesus Christ in a fun, respectful environment. The 90-minute program is divided into six sections, starting with walking from the school to the church, followed by a healthy snack, music, craft, Bible lesson and closing prayers. The kids are also taught to honor God's house, treat others with kindness, and use their manners.

This free program got its start four years ago when a small group of church volunteers came up with the idea and took the initiative to get the club going. "The first year we held the program with youth from our congregation. We then expanded to invite all youth in that age group," says Pastor Chris Schroder. "The program has grown from 10 to as many as 30 kids."

Holstein is a rural town of about 1,400 people and is home to five churches, including Catholic, Methodist and ELCA Lutheran congregations which started in the 1880s, and a fifth nondenominational church also launched in the past seven years. Since Faith Lutheran is so young, Pastor Schroder stresses the importance of outreach in this small community: "The program has helped the church's visibility in the community and built bridges to meet new families. We promote outreach and awareness of Bible and church teaching, which often gets overlooked in today's world," he says.

Pastor Schroder is committed to introducing Jesus to youth at an early age and planting the seeds for a solid Biblical foundation. He points to the lessons imparted by Paul to his protégé Timothy: "From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3:15)

"We have a blend of youth who are both church and unchurched. We choose lessons that are both familiar such as Noah's Ark and Abraham, and less familiar such as Blind Bartimaeus and Taming the Tongue. We have the youth read from the Bible, participate in discussions and we even act out important lessons, such as Jesus washing the disciples' feet," Pastor explains.

How We Do It

Wednesdays during the school year, after school until 5 p.m.

Everyone welcome – everything free (including KFC logo T-shirt)

Kids must bring parent-authorized sign-up sheet at beginning of each school year

4-6 adult teachers and helpers

2-4 middle school and high school helpers

15-30 youth

Typically six, 15-minute segments: Walking (or driving in inclement weather) to church with adults; healthy snack; music; Bible study/story; movie; prayer/closing.

Parents pick up kids at 5 p.m. (or authorize kids to walk home).

During Lent this year, two special activities were featured: the washing of the feet after studying John 13; and depicting in words or drawings how kids feel about participating in KFC. Both activities were well-received and nudged the children to really think about what they were doing. As their ages, writing levels and knowledge of the Bible vary widely, so too were their reactions delightfully varied.

"I love eating the food, singing the songs and learning about God and his people. It is even a privilege to come to KFC!! We get to watch movies, lessons and short clips about the 10 commandments and life lessons," writes Asher Endrulat, fifth grade. In addition to Jayley and Asher, big sister Jerzey is a seventh-grade helper. She wrote: "I loving helping and working with the kids. I love how Pastor teaches us new things. This is the house of God. We love God!"

All of the children say they look forward to Wednesdays so they can come to KFC. Here is a sampling of more responses: "My favorite thing about KFC is the Bible study because I can learn more about God and his word," writes Josie Schechinger, fourth grade, with drawings of a purple-cloth-draped cross and lots of KFCs with exclamation points. "I like craft and snack. It's awesome. Jesus. Music. Crafts. Learn. Bible Study," writes Sara Schroder, fifth grade, with many of colors and a drawing of the altar. "My favorite part of KFC is craft because I get to bring fun stuff home for Daddy," Hannah Friedrichsen, first grade, with a drawing of a child at the craft table, a cross and heart. "Things I like at KFC are the games and crafts that my mom makes. I also like the yummy snacks. Our pastor teaches the Bible stories," Tyler Friedrichsen, fifth grade, with drawing of Pastor Schroder holding a Bible and teaching a child holding a Bible.

The ultimate goal of KFC is the same as the goal of Faith Lutheran, and the goal of The AALC, to follow the Great Commission, laid out in Matthew 28: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." We pray that with God's help we can continue to add numbers to our program, continue to reach out to our community and beyond, and continue to make new friends and new, young disciples of Jesus.

Prayer Bookmark

August

1. Rev. Chris A. Schroder
2. Rev. Chris Rosebrough
3. Rev. Clyde Awtrey
4. Rev. Dan Sollie
5. Rev. Daniel Dapelo
6. Rev. David Huskamp
7. Rev. Devon Woodyard
8. Rev. Dr. Daniel Schroeder
9. Rev. E. David Gensch
10. Rev. Eric Ishimaru
11. Rev. Fred W. Balke
12. Rev. Gary Benson
13. Rev. Gary Rokenbrodt
14. Rev. Gregory D. Stenzel
15. Rev. Harold C. Johnson
16. Rev. Jerry Storrs
17. Rev. John Morley III
18. Rev. Jordan Cooper
19. Rev. Joseph Christina
20. Rev. Joseph Marsh
21. Rev. Len Brokenshire
22. Rev. Mark Homp
23. Rev. Michael Badenhop
24. Rev. Michael 'Myke' Main
25. Rev. Nathan Hoff
26. Rev. Norman C. Hoffeld
27. Rev. Norman R. Beighley
28. Rev. Paul Hueter
29. Rev. Phillip Hofinga
30. Rev. Poul Erik Norgaard
31. Rev. Ray E. Lorthioir, Jr.

Prayer Bookmark

September

1. Rev. Robert G. Snitzer
2. Rev. Rusty Phillips
3. Rev. Scott Neumann
4. Rev. Scott Strohkirch
5. Rev. Scott W. Bieker
6. Rev. Steve Lundblom
7. Rev. Steve Smeback
8. Rev. Steven Klawonn
9. Rev. Tim M. Cartwright
10. Charles Sandison
11. Curt Roeszler
12. Henry Silke
13. Mike Zaske
14. Rev. Ryan Dexter
15. Todd Krenzer
16. Rev. Dave Spotts, Seminary Professor
17. Rev. Dean Stoner, National Mission Developer
18. Rev. Dr. Craig Henningfield, Seminary Professor
19. Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, Presiding Pastor
20. Rev. Irvin Stapf, Secretary of TAALC
21. Rev. Joe Dapelo, Administrator of the TAALC
22. Rev. Rich Shields, Seminary President
23. Rev. Roger Twito, Assistant Presiding Pastor
24. Bonnie Ohlrich, Secretary/Coordinator TAALC/ALTS
25. Dr. Adam Francisco, Seminary Professor
26. Dr. Dan Kruger, Treasurer of the TAALC
27. Janet Price, Master of Arts student
28. Lisa Cooper, Master of Arts student
29. Angie Wagner, Master of Arts student
30. Faith Rosebrough, Master of Arts student

THE LIVING LAST SUPPER

Pilot Knob Lutheran Church, Forest City, Iowa

By The Rev. Robert Snitzer



It was suggested through our revitalization committee to perform the Living Last Supper on Maundy Thursday. Members were excited as we began planning for it in January of this year.

It appeared to be a large undertaking for a small congregation in rural Iowa. However, we believed the Lord wanted us to do it so the pastor, his wife and the revitalization committee took a step of faith and action setting it in motion. The purpose was to declare the loving sacrifice of our Lord through his suffering and rejection.

The challenge was getting fourteen men to participate. As a result we saw the Lord at work bringing members together to fill thirteen positions and three weeks before the drama we got the last disciple. The Lord also provided the needed background and other props from a congregation in Iowa. We witnessed the faithfulness of the Lord when we could have panicked that everything wasn't falling into place as we would have liked it and at our timing. The time spent in rehearsals was also beneficial as it brought the men together creating camaraderie.

The production went well and we had nearly every seat filled, with an estimated 105 in attendance. We look forward to doing it again next year

Roundup at St. Paul Lutheran

Tripoli, Iowa | by James Lahmann

"Barnyard Roundup, Jesus Gathers Us Together" was the theme of another successful Vacation Bible School in the heart of this agricultural region of northeast Iowa.

The summer Bible school themes were: Jesus cares, now and forever! (the Good Shepherd); Jesus provides, now and forever (feeding the five thousand); Jesus leads, now and forever (parable of the sower); Jesus forgives, now and forever (the lost son); and Jesus is our Savior, now and forever (Jesus appears to Mary).

The rooms were decorated in the barnyard theme including one room covered with old weathered barn boards. One of the special activities was a barnyard roundup right at the parking lot of St. Paul Lutheran. Members of the Sumner-Fredricksnurg Lucky Clovers 4-H Club brought dozens of barnyard animals for the children to meet, pet, and hold. The display included lambs, pigs, four breeds of dairy calves, rabbits, exotic chickens, dogs, puppies, cats, and kittens. As a safety precaution, no large animals were included. Visitors came from many surrounding communities to see this roundup.

Even in rural Iowa, most children have little opportunity see and come into contact with farm animals. Even in church-filled Iowa, many of our children have not had the experience to share in Jesus' message of his 'round-up' unless the local congregation encourages and gathers them together.

The American Association of Lutheran Churches invites you to attend
The 500th Anniversary of The Reformation Celebration
 October 31-November 1, 2017
 Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of Deephaven in Wayzata, MN
 18360 Minnetonka Blvd, Wayzata, MN 55391-3232



Registration Fee: \$75 per person
 Registration Deadline: September 1, 2017

Make checks payable to: The AALC

Mail Payment and Registration Form to:

The AALC 921 E. Dupont Road #920 Fort Wayne, IN 46825

Please detach the Registration form here, fill out the information, and include with payment.

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Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

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