

# *The* EVANGEL

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# Letter From the Editor

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. This edition of *The Evangel* is the last and final installment of the series on *Luther's Small Catechism*, with an emphasis on the sacraments: Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Often referred to as the "means of grace," the sacraments are the ways in which God brings Jesus and his benefits of life, forgiveness, and sustaining faith to us through regular, ordinary, God-ordained ways.

The first baptism that my husband ever performed was our son's baptism. We timed seminary and childbirth just right, I suppose. I remember being a brand-new parent and holding my impossibly tiny new son in my arms with tears of joy as the name of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, was spoken in connection with the water. Luther writes, that baptism "works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe, as the words and promises of God declare." My son, in that moment, through the power and mercy and work of God became my brother in Christ. He was adopted as God's son, forgiven of his sin, and given a new heart to love those around him. But how could water do such amazing things?

*It is not the water indeed that does them, but the word of God which is in and with the water, and faith, which trusts such word of God in the water. For without the word of God the water is simple water and there is no baptism. But with the word of God it is a baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost.*

Baptism is the beginning of the life of faith. God reaches into our world for us, raises us from death into life through the water, and declares us his children by placing His name on us. In beginning this life of faith, contrition and repentance must necessarily follow.

"It signifies that the old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man come daily forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

Luther understands so clearly which "direction" the sacraments take. Do I, of my own power, choose baptism? Is it my work to appease a Holy God? No. It is God's work. It is God's work in bringing salvation and applying it to us. It is God's work in sustaining us as we daily repent of our sin. We need to

remember our identity in Christ daily. Daily we need to see our need of being saved. Daily we need to be comforted with the promises of God. Luther recommended making the sign of the cross to remember the reality of the effects of baptism: the cross—the work of Jesus—is literally applied to us. What a great comfort this is.

In Christ,  
Lisa Cooper

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# Instruments of Word and Sacraments

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

There are various types of instruments: surgical instruments, musical instruments, and even Texas Instruments. But, when it comes to saving faith, other instruments will not help you. You need the Instruments of the Word and Sacraments! These are the only instruments that deliver the saving grace of God. In the Augsburg Confession, Article V, we are told that these instruments are absolutely essential to our faith:

*So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments **as through instruments** the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel, that is to say, in those who hear that God, not on account of our own merits but on account of Christ, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace on account of Christ.*

We have learned from Scripture that we are justified by grace through faith apart from works of the Law (Romans 3: 28). This is a great comfort, because this verse and many others reveal that God will not judge us on account of our works, but only on account of our faith in Jesus.

The problem is that we may begin to wonder about the faith that we have. Do I have enough faith to be saved? Is it good enough, strong enough, or fruitful enough? Taking an honest look at my faith, I sometimes wonder what kind of faith I have. When God looks at my faith, doesn't He see how weak it is? Doesn't He see how small it is? Doesn't God see how faithless my faith really is? I wonder if I have saving faith at all.

Here is where the teaching about God's *instruments* becomes so crucial. The Augsburg Confession not only tells us that faith in Jesus saves us, but that saving faith comes to us, *as through instruments*. God has established a delivery system that is not dependent upon us. God, the Holy Spirit, uses the Word of God and the Sacraments of Christ, as His perfect delivery system. Through these means, *as through instruments*, the Holy Spirit delivers God's saving faith. When you hear or read the Word of God, you get what God promises. The Word does not depend upon you at all. It is living and active in and of itself. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). It is the same with the Sacraments. They freely deliver God's gracious gifts. When you were baptized, God did what He said. He forgave your sins and gave you the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). He buried you and raised you to new life in Christ (Romans 6:4). God saved you (I Peter 3:21)! Similarly, when you receive the Lord's Supper, the true body and blood of Jesus, God completely forgives all of your sins (Matthew 26:28). Where there is forgiveness, there also are salvation and eternal life! It is true that one may resist or refuse such gifts. But, the comfort is that God creates faith and gives life to all who hear and believe.

Do you see how gracious your God and Father is to you? He does not want you to wonder if you have received His gifts of faith, forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. He knows that if it were up to you, or if it depended upon you, you always would be wondering if you had done enough, been good enough, or had faith enough.

To stop such painful and doubtful wondering, God established a delivery system. Through the Word and the Sacraments, the Holy Spirit has given you faith. In addition, the Holy Spirit has given you forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. These gifts were not dependent upon you, but upon God Himself. These gifts came into you, just as God had promised, **as through instruments**.

# Looking for Love

by The Rev. Dave Spotts

**W**e arrange all sorts of decorations for ourselves, don't we? From the homes we live in, the cars we drive, our clothing, hair and makeup, even tattoos, we live in a culture that actively pursues appearance to make statements about our personalities, our hopes, and even our values. Much of our appearance seems carefully tailored to express who we really are.

Is this entirely bad? Not at all. Jesus says that when we fast we should make ourselves look like we are perfectly normal. God tells the priests in the Old Testament what they are to wear when engaged in their appointed service. And I freely admit that one of the reasons I wear clericals to do almost all my work is because I want people to recognize that I am some sort of Christian minister on duty. The message of our appearance does matter. And it signals some of our values or habits.

I saw, ironically enough, on St. Valentine's Day, a young lady, looking serious, studious, diligent, but not generally happy. Why is this ironic? It should be commonplace. I work in campus ministry. I probably saw several thousand people that day, and paused to notice maybe a few hundred. This person seemed completely commonplace until I saw and considered her tattoo: LOVE YOURSELF FIRST, in big blue capital letters, on her forearm.

I have long thought it is a good idea to consider very carefully any message we are going to have written permanently on our bodies. This is no exception. Our culture, in its pursuit for self-fulfillment, urges everyone, especially young women, to care for themselves. Possibly this has some value in discouraging the recent epidemic of self-harm found among young people. It certainly appears to be part of common-sense prevention. If we care for ourselves we might hesitate to harm ourselves.

What I'd like to know, though, is why this young lady seemed preoccupied and gloomy. She also appeared very busy with several books, sorting through notes, apparently preparing for a test or paper. I didn't bother her. After all, it is unusual to initiate a meeting of a stranger by saying, "You don't seem entirely happy today, would you tell me about it?" And I freely admit that there are any number of reasons she may have seemed gloomy. Maybe her dog died. Maybe she had a cold. Maybe she had an argument with a friend. It could be little or nothing in her specific case.

The larger question, though, remains. We live in a culture that is generally prosperous, healthy, well fed, and in which there are a lot of opportunities for social, educational, and economic growth. We ought to be able to find joy and peace. Yet we are more addicted to painkillers, antidepressants, and therapists than ever before. Something isn't working right. "Love yourself first" seems like it would be a good way to be happy. Why does it work so badly?

The Bible pictures true and abiding joy coming not from serving ourselves but from laying our lives down in service to others. We delight in possessions as we learn to share them with our neighbor. We enjoy our good health as we are able to use it for the good of our community. We realize that the hard work of gaining a higher educational level is worth it as we use that learning for the benefit of all. It's as we are an offering poured out for the Lord that we see He has considered us as his precious children. As we see that God has loved us first, we realize it is inconceivable that we should want to harm ourselves. As we understand God's love for us, we learn how to love and serve our neighbors.

How do we decorate ourselves? We adorn ourselves with good works, with love and faithfulness, which our Lord has appointed for us, so that the world can see His loving grace. Love yourself first? No, love the Lord your God first, and your neighbor as yourself.



*Updates from*

# Christ Lutheran Church

*in Duluth, Minnesota*

*by Carolyn Lofald*

***“Behold, I make all things new”*** *Revelation 21:5*

**W**e are so excited to update everyone and share our wonderful news: we are blessed that Pastor Gary DeSha answered the call to be our Shepherd. He and his wife Sue are from Alexandria, MN. We are so thankful for them; they are in every way a team! They have a vision for Christ Lutheran and they are excited to share that with us and our community.

Pastor Gary was installed on March 24, 2019 here at Christ Lutheran, with Dr. Curtis Leins officiating. Pastor Dean Stoner was also a part of this glorious day. We celebrated with a wonderful catered brunch after the service. Praise God! All things new! Pastor Michael Main had retired in October of 2017 and Pastor Carl Bengtson agreed to be our interim Pastor from November 2017 through August 2018. We were blessed to have the assistance of our Missouri Synod sister church, Peace In Christ, and their associate pastor, Pastor Kevin Richter, who

provided services for us on a number of Sundays, including Christmas Eve. Others we would like to thank for serving are Mr. Andrew Virkus, seminarian; Mr. Ben Baker, seminarian graduate; Pastor David Johnson from Arcadia, WI; Pastor John Anderson from Bagley, MN; Pastor Tom Stover from Minneapolis, MN; Mr. Chris Adams, Youth

Pastor from Grace Lutheran in Deephaven, MN and Pastor Joe Marsh, our regional pastor from St. Paul, MN. We are very thankful for these AALC pastors, some retired yet still willing to share God's Word with us and willing to drive the distance to help us. We are thankful, too, for the friendships we have made along the way. Many of our parishioners also stepped up to lead our service and read sermons for us as well.

When we look back, we see God's hand in all that has happened in our church since our two lightning strikes and fire. We see much of the physical progress (material things with our reconstruction) and also the spiritual growth (our preparation so to speak). We have learned to trust God, have patience, and accept all the changes that He has used to sharpen us. He had a plan and knew all of this would happen in the way it did. We are still physically repairing the structure of our church building. The only thing left to install in our sanctuary is the stained glass in our cupola, otherwise, our sanctuary has been fully cleaned and restored. All things new! Pastor, we hope, is feeling at home in his newly-painted office with bookshelves that were lovingly made and installed by a couple of members. We updated our Fellowship Hall with a new "coffee center" including two quick-brew coffee makers, prep area and sink. Weather permitting, we will begin outdoor projects soon, including installing a new play yard for the children. All things new!

We feel so blessed and look forward to all our Lord and Savior has in store for our church family. To God be the Glory! Amen!

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# THE PASTOR IS IN

by The Rev. Nathan Hoff



Psalm 147 is my assigned reading for Wednesdays and Thursdays and reminds me that God is the rebuilder of the city, and the healer of the broken-hearted, the One most committed to verdant city-life, the One who strengthens the bars of the gates of the city, and establishes it in peace. I find the connected Psalm prayer helps me pray for San Pedro, our city within the city of Los Angeles. “God our Father, great builder of the heavenly Jerusalem, you know the number of stars and call each of them by name. Heal hearts that are broken, gather those who have been scattered, and enrich us all from the plentitude of your eternal wisdom, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

My Tanzanian Lutheran pastor friends in the Northern Diocese spend most of their time out in their parish (the geographic neighborhood where their congregation assembles), and they spend very little time in their offices. By the way, the large Lutheran Church in Tanzania is still growing. Another friend who serves on the other coast has been spending part of a day outside of Immanuel Lutheran in Manhattan, NY, the congregation he has served for decades. He has made a booth that looks like Lucy’s booth from the Peanuts cartoon. You know the one, “Psychiatric Help — 5 cents — The Doctor is In.” This pastor, Gregory Fryer, changed it a bit for his own purposes to “Spiritual Help — 5 cents — the Pastor is in.” I contacted him to ask if I could steal his idea. He responded, “I was hoping others would try it!”

After nearly 14 years at Trinity in San Pedro, I have felt a stronger magnetic pull to my office, and I’ve been looking for a way to break that pull. So, I asked Jim Holland to make me a Lucy Booth, I like to call it my “grace station.” Through the Lenten season, I sat there for a few hours a day. I found the prime time to be drop off and pick up time for our neighboring school, Seventh Street School. I hand out cold water when I have it. I have about 36 Bible verse “words of the day” that I pray over and hand out to whoever will take

them. Instead of taking a nickel, I give them away. Trinity people keep giving me nickels—Hundreds of them! Here is what I've learned.

1. People need a God with ears! Can you imagine the Psalms without cries to a God with ears? "Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer" (Psalm 61.1). "Hear my voice, O God" (Psalm 64.1). Some people are looking for advice. A few come with ethical dilemmas or moral questions. Some are looking for absolution. But, almost everyone needs to be heard. So, I listen. When I speak, I want my words to communicate holy truth. When I listen, I want my ears to communicate holy hearing. One lady stopped her car by my booth, jaw dropped, then a quick turn of her steering wheel. Before you knew it she was sitting and crying. She opened up, "I just left the hospital parking lot and prayed, 'God, I need someone to talk to about this. And then I drove two blocks up 7th Street and here you are—the pastor is in.'" Jesus has ears.
2. People aren't interrupting me, I'm interrupting them. My booth is on their sidewalk. They weren't expecting my cold water bottle on their daily dog walk. They can't figure out why I'm giving nickels away instead of taking something from them. One introverted guy tried to make very little eye contact with me as he walked past. He got half way down the block and turned around and said, "OK, I can't stand it. What are you doing here?" After he found out, he tried to give me \$20, but I gave him a word for the day and nickel. He left smiling. Al Rogness (President of Luther Seminary from 1954-1974) walked with more of an amble instead of an urgency. He gave the air of availability. He is reported to have said, "It is important that a pastor appears to be lazy as if he has nothing to do." I think I understand what he meant. Almost everyone who comes to my office enters saying, "Pastor, I know you are busy, but..." No one has said that when they come up to my booth. Jesus isn't busy.
3. People are lonely. "Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink." These are poetic and tragic lines from "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The picture is of a mariner on the open sea, thirsty, but surrounded by salt water. We are surrounded by counselors (many good ones too), we might have a thousand 'friends' on social media, and access to good health care or even mental health resources. But some have said we are experiencing an epidemic of loneliness. One man drove up

and said, "I have seen you here for a few days, and I was hoping you'd be here now. I made a deal that if you were here, I would get out and talk to you about my struggle." Maybe this is the cup of cold water Jesus is talking about in Matthew 10.42? Jesus is living water.

4. The gospel—the good news that God is for us, for Christ's sake—is the greatest power in the universe. A gospel-motivated wave, smile, or water bottle gift is super. But, nothing can replace the good word right from the heart of Jesus. He says, "I will never leave you or forsake you." "When you walk through the fire, I will be with you." "I forgive you." When these promises are communicated, the sidewalk near 7th and Weymouth becomes holy ground—encounter places. Jesus is the actual grace station.
5. I have much to learn! Entering more profoundly into my parish affords me with an awareness of my actual neighbors. What are their rhythms? What are their values? What are their struggles? I've met Peter. He can't figure out why he is in San Pedro, but is starting to wonder if he is supposed to be in Jesus' family at Trinity. Otis lives across the street. He is a Christian brother and an ally in the neighborhood, that I didn't even know. Cindy works nearby. She is an anonymous Christian, believing in Jesus but she feels separated from his people because of some life situations she is experiencing. Linda and her family are Jehovah Witnesses. In our first encounters, they barely made eye contact, but now we've become friends. Me sitting in a booth listening to people and talking to them about Jesus is just as crazy as them knocking on doors. I've become friends with the principal at Seventh Street School and all her teachers came to Trinity for an "in-service" last week. Julia Anderson in our congregation had the bright idea to raise money to give each teacher a \$25 gift card, a pack of gum, See's Candy, and a card from their "neighbors at Trinity." They were overwhelmed. This is changing our stance in our town. Jesus loves San Pedro and he loves Seventh Street School.

In a way, maybe we are learning a new way to be in our community. Defensive fists and pointy fingers are ineffective at reaching or convincing our neighbors to convert or change. There is a cruciform alternative to fists and finger pointing. That alternative is wounded hands extended in blessing. Jesus' hands reaching out on the extended cross, and reaching out in his resurrection in the upper room, and reaching out from the upper room through his church from Pentecost and beyond.

# Rise & Rejoice!

by *The Rev. Rich Eddy*

**W**hen I get up each morning, I usually listen to the radio during my morning ablutions. My preference is talk radio shows on the AM dial, which can be entertaining and, at the same time, help me keep up with the news. Unfortunately, they can also be discouraging, as the hosts and guests tend to focus on the problems we face in our country and world. The problems can be the actual developments—bad news—or the disagreements and arguments about those developments which seem to divide our country and its people. A person can come away from those talk shows feeling down about what the future may hold for us all.

Well, I recently turned on the radio again, only to find the AM dial to be a wasteland of infomercials, you know, the kind that are structured to sound like real news stories or interviews, but are really just advertisements for some product or service. There's nothing wrong with companies using such programs to sell their wares; I just don't want to listen to them. And so, yesterday I switched to the FM dial, planning to listen to some music.

After scanning the available frequencies I finally settled on a station that was playing classic Christian hymns, songs like: "Crown Him With Many Crowns" and "Holy, Holy, Holy." I was enjoying the music while I shaved, trying not to cut myself while singing along with my resonant, bass voice. Then, one of the songs ended, and the announcer identified the program as "Rise and Rejoice." I liked that phrase.

This is not an endorsement of that show, which is found on the Family Radio network, because I haven't had the chance to listen to their commentaries and teachings enough to vouch for them. What I am endorsing is the concept that as Christians we should "rise and rejoice," that is, begin each day by rejoicing in God our Savior.

This was a good reminder to me that my Christian walk is about more than doctrinal statements or theological study. Such things are good and necessary, but I have been too focused on believing and articulating the "right" beliefs, that I have sometimes forgotten to thank God for what he has done and rejoice in knowing him and his grace. As I considered this call to rejoice, I thought about the ways in which rejoicing is beneficial to me and to everyone who come into contact with me.

## So, what is so good about rejoicing?

**It is commanded in Scripture.** "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4); "And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God in all that you undertake" (Deuteronomy 12:18); "Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice!" (1 Chronicles 16:10 and Psalm 105:3). Because Scripture commands it, we rejoice whether or not we *feel* like rejoicing. It is like generosity, forgiveness, and service: we do those things because they are right for a Christian to do, regardless of any special giftedness or desire to do them. We owe it to God to rejoice in him.

**It follows the example of Christ himself.** Luke 10:21 tells us that Jesus rejoiced: "In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.'" Christ was righteous in his act of rejoicing, and he set an example for us to do the same.

**It is a positive way to begin each day.** If we were to get up and take a long car trip, we would make sure we had a full tank of gas before starting out. Likewise, a good breakfast helps us have the energy and nutrients needed to face the day ahead. How much more should our spirits be focused on God before we do anything else? Think of the difference it would make to face the day's challenges knowing in your heart that God loves you and has already blessed you greatly! Instead of starting out glum (thanks to the news), we can start out refreshed and encouraged, ready to face whatever lies ahead.

**It is a counter to the unending stream of bad news that assails us.** It is easy to become glum when we are constantly bombarded by stories of crime, war, injustice, terrorism, and political squabbles and lies. But when we consider what God has done for us through Jesus Christ, how can we not be uplifted? We have a loving God who made us, redeemed us and reconciled us to him though we were his enemies, and who has prepared a place for us in heaven for all eternity to come. How great is that! Plus, even in this life he has given us gifts, and works through us to bless others. Isaiah 16:10 gives us good reasons for rejoicing: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered



me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." Our rejoicing is based on the objective facts of what God has done for us.

**It puts reality into true perspective.** If all you hear are the news media (whatever political slants are favored), you come to define the world around you—in fact, all of reality—in political or sociological terms. Your priorities become what the news tells you is important, and you are subject to their manipulations. You find yourself running to and fro, following one person and angry at another, only to switch when new stories come out. But if you turn off the chatter and listen again to God through his Word, you come to realize that no matter what happens around you in the visible world, there is an invisible reality in which God works. As the Nicene Creed says, Christ is the Creator of things, "visible and invisible." The hymn, "This is My Father's World," says, "That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet." We would forget that truth if all we saw, heard, and thought were limited to the secular media. What is real and true goes so far beyond what the world says is so important.

**It blesses others around us.** We can see how rejoicing lifts our spirits and "centers us" on what is important and real in this world and beyond. But beyond us, the impact of our rejoicing can have a dramatic and beneficial effect on others, as well. When we are uplifted and encouraged, our joy can be contagious. Even among nonbelievers, it helps them to interact with someone who is happy; how much more so among other believers, when our rejoicing reminds them of

their own blessings in Christ. When we rejoice, we are witnesses to Christ for those who don't know him yet ("You are my witnesses" Isaiah 43:10), and encouragers for those who do but are having tough times or are even wavering in their faith (Hebrews 10:24-25). To *not* rejoice is to deprive our fellow Christians of something we owe them.

**It glorifies God and helps fulfill the 1st Commandment.** One of our sinful tendencies, if not *the* greatest one, is our tendency to look anywhere except God when it comes to recognizing our blessings. We thank other people, the economy, our education and training, our own abilities, our "connections," luck ("our lucky stars"), or something else, when it comes to finding the source of the good we have in life. "I earned it!" we think, forgetting that God gave us the life, the abilities, and the situations which have blessed us. Luther reminded us of this in his explanation to the First Commandment, saying, "For even though otherwise we experience much good from men, still whatever we receive by His command or arrangement is all received from God," and "For creatures are only the hands, channels, and means whereby God gives all things." When we recognize and rejoice at what God has done for us, we are recognizing him as God above all other so-called gods of money, possessions, pride, and nature. We see the Creator, and not the creation as the source of all good things.

So, then, I encourage you to follow my lead in rejoicing at the start of each day: in song, in prayer, and in the Scriptures. I am sure I will forget to do so some days, or be distracted by various things. But if we consider all his benefits, how can we not rejoice in God our Savior?





Photo by Mel Weinstein

# Vietnamese Families Celebrate *at Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church*

*by Bonnie Ketterl Kane*

Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church was recently the venue for an unusual reunion. Forty years ago, in 1979, the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services sent an appeal to churches across the country to host refugee families escaping from Vietnam. SMLC, then named El Camino Pines Lutheran Church, accepted the plea and submitted their application. They were promptly assigned the Den Nguyen family.

For two years the patriarch of the family, Den Nguyen, was instrumental in instigating and coordinating the escape of his family from their village of Phu Yen. Supplies were gathered and hidden, a boat and captain hired. As villagers were only allowed to buy or have in their possession small amounts of gasoline, small amounts were purchased and stored in containers in the walls of their homes. The families had to be very careful not to let the wrong people know about the plan or they would have been arrested.

Den and his wife, Cao, and their extended families, plus the families of two doctors, were in on the plan. It was important to have the doctors on-board as some of the women were pregnant. The doctors were also needed to help keep the children sleeping much of the time at sea. In May of 1978 a group of about forty escaped the mainland in a fishing boat with most of them crowded below deck.

For seven nights and six days they fought the stormy sea, avoiding a rocky coastline and pirates. A very high percentage of those fleeing Vietnam lost their lives at sea. Their main source of food was watermelon as it also provided water, but most were too ill to eat it. They had intended to go to Hong Kong but were blown off course and landed in the Philippines.

Upon landing, those who found them took them to Manila where a small refugee camp had been established. When the families arrived there, there were only fifty others in the camp and by the time they left the camp some nine months later, there were 5,000.

As countries were found that would take in the refugees, Den and his family all waited for offers from America. The offer from El Camino Pines Lutheran Church came in January 1979, and it was

suggested that one of Den and Cao's daughters would go first. Moi, her husband, Hung Le, and their three little daughters—the youngest born in the refugee camp—arrived in Los Angeles in early February where they were greeted by a contingent of congregation members.

The resettlement committee had rented a small house complete with furniture and clothing. Weeks of settlement followed involving everything from medical needs to driving lessons and a job for Hung.

Not long after the arrival of the Le family, Moi's sister, Nay, and husband, Tien and five children arrived, so a large four bedroom house was found. Then followed Den and Cao and their five unmarried children. By then, Tien had left for a job in Los Angeles but there were more. Den and Cao's youngest son, Boi, his wife Gin, and three children were the last to arrive making a total of twenty-four sponsored by the small Lutheran congregation.

All of the very gracious and thankful people moved on to the Los Angeles area as soon as employment could be found. Den and Cao started a Vietnamese catering business and were able to put all their children and grandchildren through college.

The resettlement undertaking couldn't have been accomplished without the assistance from several other churches and residents of the small mountain communities here in Frazier Park.

The month of February 2019 was chosen to recall and celebrate the arrival of the now very extended Vietnamese. On a very snowy day, with threats of Interstate 5 closing, some fifty very determined Vietnamese, now all American citizens, from California and out of state as well, gathered at Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church. Members of the congregation of forty years ago and the present congregation joined in the celebration to hear the stories of the escape from Vietnam and to receive the many warm expressions of appreciation for what had been done on their behalf. A traditional Vietnamese meal had been prepared. The day and snow, were enjoyed by all.

# Why Would You Not?

by *The Rev. Joseph Christina*

It was my first VBS here in the 'ville—Fayetteville, NC. Everyone was frantically scurrying around trying to finish last minute preparations as little ones started trickling through the church fellowship hall door. A couple came in with a young daughter and her father introduced himself. He was the Pastor of one of the larger Baptist churches in town. His daughter "loved" VBS and they happened to see ours was this week, so you do the math. Towards the end of the week we invited the kids to Sunday worship to sing the song they had learned. The Pastor informed me that he had a baptism that Sunday and, "As you know, baptisms are *kind of a big deal* for us Baptists." I simply responded, "Lutherans too. We even baptize our babies."

As you can imagine, I didn't exactly score many "ecumenical points" with that response. But it did call to mind something I often touch on when teaching the catechism and Holy Baptism. For church bodies who do not baptize minors and are always insistent on asking, "Why would you?" my response has always been "Why would you not?"

## **Bad Babies**

Listen. I'm a relatively gruff and rough cut kind of guy. But nothing melts my heart quite like babies do. Just the other day one of our chaplain's baby girl had the sweetest bonnet on and I felt the need to pull my wife aside before worship and tell her, "Hunny, that bonnet is killing me." Babies are my Achilles heel. But the Scriptures make it quite clear: they're sinners. Even from the moment of conception, little ones swimming around in their Mommas' wombs are not right with God. They are his enemies. Cute as those little buttons can be, they are no different than a pre-born King David who was "sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). I am often times reminded of my wife's cousin asking her over the phone one time in exasperation where little ones learn how to throw such tantrums. (We, of course, already knew the answer to that). And if we are to believe the inspired Apostle Paul—and I trust that we all do—if baptism does indeed "wash our sins away" (Acts 22:16), then we know of only one remedy for those cute yet deplorably sinful babies: the water and the Word.

## **Pesky Peter**

Ever find yourself in a debate regarding infant Baptism? Quote 1 Peter 3:21: "And this water [the flood waters of Noah's time] symbolizes baptism that now *saves you* also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." For lifelong Lutherans who have been catechized, this is easy enough for us to understand. The Sacraments are means of grace. The Holy Spirit effectively works through the simple yet powerful means of water and the Word of God. As we examine the above, and realize that even the cutest of little ones are rotten to the core, we draw the conclusion that we know of no other option by which they too must be saved: Holy Baptism. Adorable as they may be in their bonnets and onesies and cute little duck outfits from Carters, they are conceived God's very enemies (Romans 5:10). And there is only one means given to us through the Scriptures by which they might be reconciled: Baptism.

So, in the course of my discussions in the Bible belt with those who constantly ask, "Why do all y'all Lutherans splash your babies with water?" I will simply point to the Word of God and respond, "Why would y'all not?"



A total of 25 ladies attended Bible Lutheran Church's 2nd annual spring/summer Women's Retreat.

# Bible Lutheran Church Hosts 3rd Women's Retreat

by *Lea Eldred*

**W**hile serving as missionaries in Turkey, one of our ministries was a 3-day ladies' conference for women who were scattered along the south coast of Turkey. When we returned from Turkey the summer of 2017, I wanted to start a similar conference for our ladies at Bible Lutheran because we are a 'scattered congregation' with all but four families living out of the community of Dodge Center, some as far as 1-1/2 hours from one another. After talking and praying we decided to do two 1-day retreats per year.

In June 2018, 16 ladies, from 15 to 85, met at the lakeside home of Shirley Friese with the theme of prayer. Mardell Lindberg, wife of Dr. Duane Lindberg, spoke on prayer. We spent time in prayer and fellowship and crafted prayer journals from notebooks and scrapbook paper. December 2018 saw us at Club I.O.U. in Dodge Center with

the theme of 'Christmas Traditions' with discussion led by NoEl Hoffeld, wife of Pastor Norman Hoffeld; Christmas music, lunch, and we created Christmas evangelism bags to hand out to friends, store clerks, and service people.

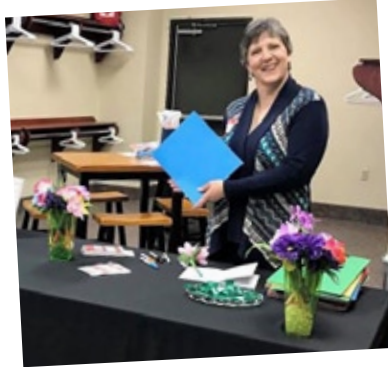
On Saturday, April 6th, 25 ladies gathered at Praise Fellowship (our host church) for a spring retreat. Retreat registration opened at 9:00 am and event lasted until 4:30 pm and included a message and worship by dynamic speaker, author, artist, & singer/songwriter, Michelle Rayburn. The message was 'Grace for Life's Imperfect Moments.' There were also small groups, which discussed the message, a time of crafts, two coffee breaks and a lunch with delicious homemade treats. Michelle also offered counseling and prayer to any ladies who desired it. A blessed time was had by all! With the help of Thrivent, we were able to offer this retreat free to all ladies.

We received several calls and cards with good reviews on the retreats. One guest, Lois, who returned for her third retreat, said she is always blessed by the quality of the God-centered retreats and how we enjoyed each other's company and having fun together. Marie said it was the best conference she had ever attended "because, usually, we just listen to speakers and never have time to process or get to know anyone." She especially enjoyed the small group discussion led by NoEI and getting to know so many other Christian women. Christy said, in a note, "It was very well organized and ran smoothly... Conference speaker, Michelle Rayburn, was most inspiring and musically talented. I am anxious to continue studying with my purchase of her book and study guide. The food selection and refreshment breaks were wonderful. I am unsure how you can afford to offer everything! ALL FREE!"

Our retreats are open to all ladies. If you are a member of a neighboring TAALC church, plan on participating in our next event, and bring a guest! We will publish the events on The AALC and Bible Lutheran Facebook pages and websites.

Photos (Top to Bottom):

1. Speaker Michelle Rayburn at her book table.
2. BLC member, Cathy Moenning, welcomes ladies at the registration table.
3. NoEI Hoffeld welcomes the ladies and acts as moderator for our spring Women's Retreat.
4. Betty Lindberg interacts with guest, Marie Dodds, during the craft time. Our theme was 'reflecting the light of Jesus' so we made sun catchers, votive candles, and colored cards with the conference scripture.
5. Two smiling guests enjoy craft time at the retreat.



# Prayer Bookmark

1. 50 more men in Seminary in 5 years
2. Nominating committee
3. Abiding Grace Lutheran *Gillette, WY*
4. Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, Presiding Pastor
5. Rev. Chris A. Schroder
6. American Lutheran *Mandan, ND*
7. Ascension Lutheran *Ames, IA*
8. That God would bless our outreach
9. That God would bring us 12 Affiliated Churches in 5 years
10. Rev. Roger Twito, Assistant Presiding Pastor
11. Ascension Lutheran *Waterloo, IA*
12. Commission for American Missions
13. Rev. Clyde Awtrey
14. Rev. Dan Sollie
15. Bethel Lutheran *Rowland, PA*
16. Rev. Daniel Dapelo
17. Bible Lutheran *Dodge Center, MN*
18. Unity in the church
19. Rev. Rich Shields
20. Rev. David Huskamp
21. Rev. Dean Johansen
22. Rev. Dean Stoner, National Mission Developer
23. Calvary Evangelical Lutheran *St. Paul, MN*
24. Protection for our military
25. Rev. Devon Woodyard
26. Rev. Dr. Daniel Schroeder
27. Calvary Lutheran *Crystal Lake, IA*
28. Christ Lutheran *Chippewa Falls, WI*
29. Bonnie Ohlrich, Secretary/Coordinator of The AALC
30. Hold the Line Conferences
31. Christ Lutheran *Duluth, MN*

# Prayer Bookmark

1. Christ Evangelical Lutheran *Ellis, KS*
2. Christ Lutheran *Germantown, MD*
3. Dr. Dan Kruger, Treasurer of The AALC
4. Rev. E. David Gensch
5. Christ the King Lutheran *Chesterfield, MI*
6. Commission on Evangelism
7. Rev. Eric Ishimaru
8. Rev. Fred W. Balke
9. Rev. Joe Marsh, Secretary of The AALC
10. Christ the Ray of Hope Lutheran  
*Albuquerque, NM*
11. Duane Kleven, Administrator of the ALTS
12. Rev. Gary Benson
13. Christus Victor Lutheran *Fayetteville, NC*
14. Our nation's leaders
15. Protection for the unborn
16. Dr. Adam Francisco, Seminary Professor
17. Clam Falls Lutheran *Frederic, WI*
18. Comm Luth Church of McAllister  
*Wausaukee, WI*
19. Rev. Gregory D. Stenzel
20. For the Youth
21. Rev. Dave Spotts, Seminary instructor
22. Elim Lutheran *Brush Prairie, WA*
23. Rev. Harold C. Johnson
24. Rev. Jerry Storrs
25. Rev. John Morley III
26. Rev. Dr. Craig Henningfield,  
Seminary Professor
27. Emmanuel Lutheran *Bremerton, WA*
28. Emmanuel Lutheran *Kelliher, MN*
29. TAALC Seminary Administration
30. New Pastors
31. Our Seminarians



## Jesus Loves Me

*By the Rev. Joseph Chrstina*

*This I Know: "We ring the bell to remind us that church is starting. We light the candle to remind us that Jesus is with us."*

"**T**his I Know" is a modified worship service followed by a fellowship event that takes place twice per month at Christus Victor Lutheran Church in Fayetteville, NC. It was designed particularly to reach the needs of the developmentally disabled in our community. The worship service includes a bound bulletin with pictorial cues so that attendees can follow along. Music includes noisemakers for those who may be nonverbal. The message is simplified and the group enthusiastically follows the Christ candle out of the nave at the conclusion to head to the fellowship hall or outside for a fun game or activity.



We have a large special needs community here in Cumberland County. After some cursory research, we determined that they were very underserved by churches. I have a theory that, since we are surrounded by many churches that do not baptize babies and often view this community of people as "babies," many churches are simply at a loss as to how to handle these children of the King. We decided after prayer and laying groundwork that

we would step up to serve them. Christus Victor as a whole has been very excited and eager to help out in this regard. The prayers of our brethren in TAALC are always welcome as we seek to let the Holy Spirit work through the special needs community here so that they to may know that Jesus loves them.



*Photos courtesy of the Christus Victor Facebook page*

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# Managing Social Media in the Local Congregation

*by The Rev. Dean Stoner, National Home Mission Developer*

For many years, the Commission on Evangelism (CE) has written articles in *The Evangel* magazine urging and encouraging TAALC congregations to focus on the biblical mandate to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28). Although it is a good approach for the Commission to encourage The AALC to evangelize, we do not believe it is the only task of the Commission on Evangelism. Instead of only writing about the importance of evangelism, the CE will actually help congregations to do evangelism.

We have been committed to this for nearly four years, primarily focusing our attention and efforts on Social Media (specifically the platform known as Facebook). Presently, a couple members of the CE help manage Facebook Pages for more than 32 of our congregations. They also manage the official The AALC site.

Our goal has been to bring forth the Gospel of Jesus Christ into the context of the local congregation through Facebook. We help our congregations by posting messages from Holy Scripture and articles from great Christian authors and thinkers. The CE also communicates Lutheran doctrine and theology in clever and easy to understand ways. All of this work is done to promote and proclaim the Gospel, and at the same time, build the internet identity of The AALC congregation within her local community.

Another goal of the CE is to connect all the TAALC congregations together through Facebook, thus helping alleviate the challenges of isolation that some of our congregations’ experience geographically, being so far apart from one another. By linking our different Facebook Pages together, the people of The AALC see what other congregations are doing. Through Social Media platforms such as Facebook, congregations see that they are not alone, but are part of something bigger than themselves, viz., a TAALC online community that is reaching out globally with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

To that end, the CE now wants to further expand the work of facilitating local evangelism by turning our attention to the websites of other TAALC congregations. The CE will not limit our work on Social Media, but rather expand it by assisting more TAALC congregations, if they so desire, with their websites.

As the Commission on Evangelism, we believe that through our help, we can provide a solution to the challenge of website management and updates. Website management is time-consuming and tedious work: posting, editing, and listing events, uploading sermons, podcasts, and other resources or messages that the pastor or congregational leaders may choose, and keeping the website attractive and current. The Commission on Evangelism would like to be of assistance. We can help. The CE is willing to assist those TAALC congregations that are unable to manage and update their own websites. We are willing to do the work of website management for you!

In addition, the Commission on Evangelism would like to help fund a new website for any TAALC congregation in need of a new, state-of-the-art, up-to-date website but struggles to afford it. The CE will provide \$100 toward the purchase of a new website offered by Church Plant Media. Church Plant Media is the company that The AALC uses for its website design and hosting, and we are very pleased with their products and customer service. Normally, Church Plant Media charges \$500 for their website templates. But, because of our relationship with them, CPM will discount any new by \$250 for any TAALC congregation. That means that a new website by Church Plant Media will only cost \$250 (plus a monthly hosting fee of \$50.) With the \$100 the CE will provide, your congregation can have a state-of-the-art website at a very affordable price. A new website will allow your church to provide resources for your congregation as well as community, better co-ordinate and align your Social Media efforts through such platforms as Facebook, and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a virtual audience of millions over the internet.

For more information about this program, please contact me at 419-704-5493 or deanstoner@taalc.org. I will be happy to answer your questions or assist you in any way I can.

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