

From the Pastor's Desk

Dear Friends in Christ,

As some of you have probably heard me mention in a couple of different settings, the Planning Team is currently reading and studying a compelling and challenging little book entitled, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*. This book was put in my hands sometime last year by John Gledhill, whose sons had utilized it in their ministries, one as an elder and one as a pastor. Once I had read it, I felt compelled to share it with our congregational leaders.

What I would like to begin to do this month is to use this space to share a few thoughts from the book with the entire congregation.

In the introductory chapter, the author, Thom Rainer, explains his rationale for writing the book. He begins by describing a church with which he had worked a number of years before that had since closed. He refers to this church as one "that was probably born out of vision" but "that died because she no longer had a vision."

I found that statement eye-opening. I wonder how well that might fit our congregation. A church with a very clear vision 20-25 years ago, of course. But now? Maybe you can help me answer that question.

Vision, I believe, is an important concept for churches. I have done some reading about vision over the last couple of years, and I am not going to pretend that I have always understood why it's important. Basically a church's vision involves identifying what it's going to look like when its mission is being carried out successfully.

To remind you, our mission here at Peace is to be "a caring family, reaching out to all, sharing Christ's love, and teaching God's Word." Or in condensed form: Caring, Reaching, Sharing, Teaching. What kinds of things would we be doing as a congregation if we were doing all four of those things successfully? That is one of the questions that the Planning Team is in the process of trying to answer. Having an established vision can help us to make sound decisions about the kinds of things that we should and shouldn't be doing as a congregation.

Near the end of the introductory chapter, the author reminds his readers of Jesus' promise to Peter in Matthew 16:18 that His Church will never die: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." However, that does not mean that individual churches do not die at times. In fact, the author shares a startling statistic from his personal research: as many as 100,000 churches in America are showing signs of decline towards death.

Reflecting upon the book's subtitle (*12 Ways to Keep Your Alive*), I think it's important for us to remember that ultimately our congregation's livelihood is dependent upon the Lord and not our own efforts. However, at the same time it is also important that we are always seeking to be faithful to His Word and to the mission He has entrusted to us. Along those lines, the author concludes his introductory chapter with a challenge and an accompanying prayer. I will modify both slightly and invite you, along with me, to take the challenge to heart and to make the prayer your own: May God give us the courage to make the changes necessary to give new life to our congregation.

Prayer

God, open my eyes that I might see my church as You see it. Let me see where change needs to take place, even if it is painful to me. And use me, I pray, to be an instrument of that change. Amen.

Chapter 2 of the book is entitled, "Slow Erosion." I will plan to share a few thoughts from that chapter in next month's column.

In His Service,

Pastor Derek Riddle

A few other notes from Pastor:

Congregational Officer Orientation: A beginning-of-the-year orientation session has been scheduled for Tuesday, January 31, at 7:00 p.m. The purpose of the evening will be to briefly introduce (or re-introduce) both new and returning officers to your respective positions, to consider how your positions fit into our congregation's

overall structure and mission, and to consider the way we work together and communicate with each other and the congregation as congregational leaders. Please plan to attend.

A New Member ("What Lutherans Believe") Class will begin meeting on Tuesday mornings at 10:00 a.m., beginning on Tuesday, January 31. Entitled *God For Us: An Introduction to Lutheran Teaching*, the class will consist of 8-10 sessions, and sessions will last approximately 90 minutes. This class is intended for non-members interested in learning more about what we believe and teach as Lutheran Christians and pursuing membership at Peace and members interested in a review of what we believe and teach as Lutherans. Please see Pastor if you are interested, or just plan to show up and join us!

Speaking of **new members**, over the past couple of years God has blessed us with a number of new members to our congregation: some by Transfer, some by Profession of Faith, and some by Adult Confirmation. During the service on Sunday, January 29, we will publicly receive five of those new members, who have joined the congregation at various times over the past year or so. We received three others similarly this past July, and two additional new members will not be able to be with us on January 29. Please see the New Member Board in the narthex (next to the mailboxes) for photos of all of our recent additions, and please continue to help them all to feel welcome here at Peace!

Lent Alert!

Very shortly after our March newsletter is published, the season of Lent will be getting underway. **Ash Wednesday**, with which Lent begins, is **March 1**. Our five remaining Wednesday evening services will be on March 8, 15, 22, 29, and April 5. Looking ahead to Holy Week, Holy (Maundy) Thursday is April 13, Good Friday is April 14, and Easter Sunday is April 16.

Board of Elders

Our first meeting of 2017 began with the election of officers. David Grulke was elected Chairman and Jeff Karsten, Secretary. An updated Elder Zone list was also passed out. The Elders have five two-man Team Elder Zones. The zone list is posted between the church office and Pastor's office on the bulletin board. Every member has two Elders appointed to them. If you have any questions or concerns about anything please don't hesitate to talk to your Elder or Pastor. We will also be going through our Elder "Duties and Responsibilities" to keep up-to-date.

The first month of 2017 is almost gone, and next month is a short one, and that leads us into Ash Wednesday (March 1), the beginning of Lent. During Lent we hear (as someone has said) "the rest of the story." At Christmas we celebrated the birth of Jesus, and during Lent we celebrate the life of Jesus. God sent His Son to take our place so that we may have eternal life with Him in Heaven. May we give thanks to God for sending His Son to suffer and die on the cross for us and to rise again for us. As we gather for worship each Sunday and for our mid-week services to pray, praise and sing songs to God Almighty for all He has done for us, we give Him thanks.

The Lutheran Hour

The Lutheran Hour can be heard locally on Sunday mornings at 7:00 a.m. on 92.5 FM and at 11:00 a.m. on 1450 AM. You can also listen on-line or via podcast at www.lutheranhour.org. Now you can also download the new Lutheran Hour Mobile App to your mobile device. Instructions for doing so can be found at www.lhm.org/apps/.

February 5

"Nothing But Jesus!"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz
Amid life's commotion and clamor, what will give us peace? Nothing but Jesus!
(1 Corinthians 2:1-16)

February 12

"Here's to Life!"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz
Even as the world becomes a meaner, angrier place, God calls us to share His life with others.
(Deuteronomy 30:15-20)

February 19

"Love Your Enemies--Jesus Does!"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz
God calls us to love and forgive our enemies the way He loves and forgives us.
(Matthew 5:38-48)

February 26

"Guilt's Gone"

Speaker Emeritus of The Lutheran Hour: Rev. Dr. Ken Klaus
A guilty conscience accuses; a forgiving Savior brings peace to troubled hearts.
(1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Stewardship Corner

We've all heard that stewardship is giving to the church of our time, talents, and treasure. This alliterative trinity helps us see that giving is not just about money, but about our whole lives. For God has given us everything we have and enjoy, as we confess in the meaning to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed. And what we confess first among those is that God gives us "our body and soul, our eyes, ears, and all our members, our reason and all our senses." Only then do we confess that he gives us material things. Thus the time, talents, and treasure trinity places before our eyes the fact that we are to give something of all of these things toward the mission of the church in thanksgiving for what God has provided. For everything we have and indeed everything we are comes from God's fatherly divine goodness and mercy.

The problem with this alliterative trinity comes when we replace one little word with another little word—when we replace the word *and* with the word *or*. It is always written with the *and*, but when we read it, we read it with the *or*. Thus this quite helpful trinity, which extolls that everything that we have and are is a gift from God and is to be pressed into the service of God in His church, turns into a trinity from which we can pick and choose what we will use in the service of God. The giving of our time, talents, *and* treasure turns into the giving of our time, talents, *or* treasure.

Then the question arises: Can we give of our time and talents instead of our treasures? Or perhaps it is the other way around: Can we give our treasure and not of our time and our talents? But these are the wrong questions. The right question is, can we give of our time and our talents in addition to our treasure? Yes, indeed, we are called to give of all three. The things that God gives us are not to be pitted against one another. They are given to us, and we are to press them all into God's service for the benefit of His church and our neighbors in need.

Thus we give all three. We give our treasure in the form of a generous, first-fruits proportion of our income. We give of our time in generosity for the benefit of Christ's holy church. We give of our talents in the same manner. Since God gave us all these things, we are called to give generously of all these things in faith toward Him and in fervent love toward our neighbors.

For God has provided all these things to us. Out of His fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, He gives us each time, talents, *AND* treasures as a means to bless those around us. We serve our neighbors with these things, blessing them with the blessings with which God has blessed us. We give of our time, talents, and treasures to our families, to our society, and to our church, our local congregations. And we do this because we know that we are not our own. Rather, we belong to God. We have been bought with a price—with the holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. He gave everything—His time, His talents, and His treasure—to have us as His own and to live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness. We have these things as gifts and blessings from God. Let us then press them all into service for the sake of His love—time, talents, and treasures together.

Taken from www.lcms.org

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www.michiganintouch.com to view this month's Michigan in Touch supplement.



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Peace Lutheran Church, Rogers City