

# Good News of Peace

January 2017 A.D.

A Caring Family ✦ Reaching Out ✦ Sharing Christ's Love ✦ Teaching God's Word!

## *From the Pastor's Desk*

Dear Friends in Christ,

As we begin a new year, and by way of follow-up to our December Voters Meeting, I would like to use this space this month to say a few words about two items new to our congregational budget for 2017: Outreach Ministry and the Hygiene Pantry.

Both of these items are at least partially a result of Planning Team discussions over the last year or so about where we should put our focus as a congregation now that our building mortgage has been paid off. Some concern has been expressed about the Planning Team not being very forthcoming in recent months with respect to our congregation's future. Please understand, first of all, that the Planning Team is doing its best to figure things out as we go, and we are still trying to determine what the "new ministries" we have been talking about might look like. **Any member of the congregation, by the way, remains welcome to be a part of this process.**

On the basis of our mission statement, over the past couple of years the Planning Team has identified four target areas for our ministry: caring, reaching, sharing, and teaching. The focus of our work together has essentially revolved around this question: How can we get better as a congregation in those four areas? In other words, how can we be a more caring congregation (to both our congregation and our community), how can we reach out better into our community, better share Christ's love, and better teach God's Word?

In 2015-2016, as a part of this discussion, the Planning Team devoted a lot of our time to the "Together With Impact" process through Wellspring Lutheran Services. The goal of that process was to help us start to identify specific needs that exist in our community which we might be able to incorporate into our congregation's ministry in the future. What that process suggested is that four areas: mentoring; before- and after-school programs; parenting education; and to a lesser degree, some issues related to the senior population, appear to be some of the most pressing needs in our community at this time. The challenge is that we don't really know right now how our congregation might help to address those needs.

In the meantime, we also came to realize through this process that some of the ministries in which we are currently engaged (Back-to-School Night, the Hygiene Pantry, etc.) are already helping us to address our four target areas to some degree. That may mean that we don't necessarily have to start from scratch when it comes to developing new

ministries. We might be able to begin by enhancing or expanding upon some of our current ministries.

Why is it important for our ministry to be community-focused? The church is less and less important to people today. More and more people around us consider the church to be irrelevant to their lives. We can no longer count on people coming to us simply because we are a church. In order to connect with people and eventually to connect them with the Gospel (that's the ultimate goal, of course), we have to find ways to go to them and meet their needs.

How does this affect our budget? In 2013-2014, when we had Abi here as a Family Life Minister, her position was one example of expanding our ministry and trying to be more community-minded. Having a Family Life Minister made it possible for us to do things we weren't able to do without one and haven't had much success doing since.

While we were discussing calling Abi as our Family Life Minister from Summer 2013-Summer 2014, a fair amount was said amongst our members about not being able to afford to have that position financially. However, the truth is that we did have the money available as a congregation, but a lot of it was being put into the Building Fund in order to pay off the mortgage. (I'm referring here specifically to extra money being given to the Building Fund each month and that could only be used for that purpose.) That amounted to thousands of dollars each year. Since our minimum mortgage payment was already being made, that was money that could very easily (if the congregation had chosen to do so) have been used for other ministry purposes.

Out of that situation grew the idea of the "Keep Our Ministry Growing" campaign initiated in December 2015. The thought process on the part of the Planning Team was, and has been, that once we paid off the mortgage, as long as our members continued to give at the same level, we could, in theory, start to have more money available for new ministries and ministry opportunities. For example, now maybe we would have the money available to call a part-time Family Life Minister again, or something along those lines. Or have money available for developing other new ministries in the congregation and community.

Please understand that the Planning Team has never proposed that we put off or ignore our ongoing building and property needs, like a new roof or the parking lot. These things remain important, as well. **But it doesn't have to be one or the other!** What the Planning Team is trying to help the congregation to do is to stop thinking only in terms of what our own needs are at the expense of new ministries. (In other words, "we don't have the money for this or that ministry because we need a new roof.") If our community sees us as a congregation not only putting our resources into our own

facility/property but also putting some of our resources back into the community, there's a chance they will care a lot more about our existence. In the process, we will also be finding new ways to connect with them.

The idea of the two new budgeted funds is as follows:

1. To designate some congregational funds to the Hygiene Pantry as one specific way of serving our community, making it an intentional part of our congregation's ministry and less reliant on donations in order to operate (which isn't going to be sustainable long-term).
2. To set aside some funds for other potential community-focused ministry endeavors or opportunities that might come along during the coming year. We don't know right now what they might be, but we will be prepared for them if and when they come about.

Some possibilities: partnering with the school to start a mentoring program or an after-school program; sponsoring a community-focused program for parents and/or families; and providing concrete assistance to community residents who lack sufficient resources. Nothing that requires any substantial financial commitment, however, will be done without first seeking Voter approval.

One final thought: Learning to think and act differently as a congregation than we are accustomed is not going to be easy. It is going to require courage on our part, a willingness to take risks, and a willingness to try new things knowing we might fail rather than not trying because we are afraid to fail. The Planning Team is doing our best to operate with that frame of mind, and we invite the rest of the congregation to join us in doing so. This is an ongoing effort that is going to require all of us, along with God's blessing, in order to be successful.

A happy and blessed New Year to each of you in Christ, our Savior!

In His Service,

Pastor Derek Riddle

### **More from Pastor: *Hearing from Jesus***

One of the books I am currently reading is entitled, *Joining Jesus on His Mission: How to Be an Everyday Missionary*. It is a book across which I had run before, but it was specifically recommended to me recently by Joan Sorgenfrei's uncle, who is a retired pastor. I began reading it this fall, and I have found it to be quite thought-provoking. In one of the chapters, author Greg Finke offers some tips for reading the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). These could very easily be applied to reading any portion of the Scriptures, and I thought they might be especially beneficial at the beginning of a new year:

1. The early morning is a good time to listen to Jesus in the Gospels. The habit of Jesus was to get up early to go listen to His Father (see Mark 1:35). As Jesus-followers, it might not be a bad idea to imitate Him in this practice. As someone once said, "It is better to tune your instrument before the concert begins rather than after it has concluded."

2. As you prepare to open the Gospels, invite the Holy Spirit to open your eyes, ears, and heart to what Jesus is going to give you today. After all, this is a spiritual endeavor empowered by the Spirit. By the way, while devotional materials can be very helpful for gaining insight into Jesus' teachings, try to avoid consistently substituting devotional materials for actually reading and wrestling with the words of Jesus yourself. In some ways, reading devotional materials is like having someone else physically work out for you. It's easier, but it doesn't do you nearly as much good as when you work out yourself.
3. Don't read to get through the words of Jesus. Read to get the words of Jesus through you. Take your time. You may only get through a couple of verses. Let the Spirit of Jesus bless you, wrestle with you, show you things, and invite you to do things as you go out into your day.
4. Don't settle for simply "studying about" what Jesus did and said. Let it be about talking with Him and coming to understand how you are to put His words into practice. You can do that by asking Jesus this simple question: What would You have me believe and do as a result of Your words today?

### ***Here We Stand***

At the November Voters Meeting, we made a decision to pledge \$10,000 as a congregation over the next five years towards the Michigan District's *Here We Stand* campaign. This commitment is over and above what we send to the District each year for Missions. You will be hearing more about the campaign, our congregation's involvement, and opportunities for members to become involved personally in the coming months. Below, however, as the campaign is getting underway, you will find answers to a few frequently asked questions:

*What is Here We Stand?*

*Here We Stand* is a campaign that when completed will assist the Michigan District in carrying out its mission and ministry to the fullest. *Here We Stand* provides a unique opportunity for the congregations and members of the Michigan District to bestow a wonderful thank offering as we celebrate the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. We are asking each congregation and member of the Michigan District to make a difference for the future that can only happen through a shared purpose and common goals.

*What is the financial goal of the Here We Stand campaign?*

The financial goal of *Here We Stand* is \$10,000,000.

*How will the campaign funds be distributed?*

\$3,000,000	Professional Church Worker Scholarships
\$3,000,000	Innovative Missional Ministry
\$3,000,000	Michigan District Endowment
\$1,000,000	International Ministry

*Why do we need a campaign?*

In order to carry out the mission of the Michigan District, new money – over and above current funding levels – is necessary. The percentage of unchurched in Michigan continues to increase – 16 counties in Michigan have **70% or more unchurched individuals**. That means 7 out of 10 people you encounter at the grocery store do not know/have a relationship with Jesus Christ! As our forefathers before us fulfilled the early purposes to disciple

the saved and evangelize the lost, this need continues to increase. The annual cost of a future pastor attending our seminaries is nearly \$40,000. At graduation, when this pastor receives his first call his seminary debt could be more than \$100,000. This financial strain can cause stress to the newly ordained pastor, his family, and his congregation. Now is the time to plan for the future.

*Why should our congregation participate?*

In order for us to reach our \$10 million goal, congregations are being asked to do their fair share to reach this target. The only way we can do this is by all of us walking together through an equitable goal-setting process.

*We are a small congregation. What can we do?*

Jesus loves you as His children, and He can use your gifts to do wonderful things. He used the young boy's fish and loaves to feed the multitudes. He praised the widow for the gift of her mite. Your congregation is situated exactly where God would use you as an extension of His mission arm. Participate and see how He can use you! This school year, the Michigan District is supporting Concordia University Ann Arbor Professional Church Worker students with average scholarships of \$1,680. A commitment of \$7,000 would provide one student a scholarship for four years! That is just one example of a commitment a small congregation can make.

*Our congregational budget is already strained to the limit. So is the budget of each of our households. We are already having difficulty meeting our budget. Why should we participate?*

When people are given the opportunity to hear what God is doing in His mission field and how they can be a part of it, the Spirit can move their hearts in response. We can only be prayerful that will occur in your congregation. It's important to give God's people the opportunity to respond.

*We have just come out of challenging economic times. How can we ask our congregation to participate now?*

It is important to remember that over the long term, the economy will improve. Over the years, when we have seen recessions, giving to the church has remained constant in many cases or even increased. It is during these challenging times that individuals are more generous, because the need is greater. We are asking you to provide the opportunity and invitation to your members to support this historic mission effort. Your members cannot help spread the Good News of Jesus Christ if not asked.

*We have to take care of the home fires first. Why should we participate?*

How true. The harvest fields are ready right around you. Attention needs to be given right at home. And since God says that the laborer is worthy of His hire, you get to partake of the first fruits of the offerings of God's people. You may hear cynics counter the *Here We Stand* appeal by quoting the old saying, "charity begins at home." Quite true. However, the old adage does not say that charity stops at home. From home we begin our sowing. My home congregation is the field upon which I can sow my offering to the Lord, which then in turn can sow in the community and in the Michigan District and beyond, which in turn sows in the world and back in our home congregation. The Lord's kingdom is a never-ending,

worldwide caring and sharing circle where He provides both the abundance and the privilege of sharing.

## **Board of Elders**

We hope that everyone had a Merry and Blessed Christmas this year. Christmas continues to January 6th - Epiphany. Really, Christmas continues throughout the whole year and all the years ahead. We celebrate the birth of Jesus (Happy Birthday, Jesus!) on December 25th. We receive Christmas gifts from family, friends and neighbors. What was the best gift that you received? JESUS! Great answer! Our Heavenly Father sent us our best gift ever, His Son Jesus on Christmas Day. The other gifts that we received will only last for a short while, but Jesus will be with us forever and ever. Jesus came for us, suffered and died for us, and rose again for us so that we may have eternal life in heaven with Him. We give thanks to God for all the gifts that He has given us. As we go through life raising our children, working so we can pay our bills, enjoying the things we like to do, and planning ahead for our future, do we keep JESUS in the picture? The earthly things we have will pass away, but Jesus and His heavenly home will never pass away. Keeping Jesus in the picture as we study His Word is a way to thank God for the best gift ever. As the calendar year 2017 begins, consider setting a goal or two to keep Jesus in the picture. Read God's Word daily, attend church regularly, and pray often. May the Lord continue to bless you this year and always!

## **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](http://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/](http://www.lhm.org/apps/).

### **January 1**

"Right on Time, Just When We Need His Grace"  
Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz  
It's the right time to repent, turn to God, ask for His help, and trust in the risen Savior, Jesus Christ.  
(Galatians 4:4-7)

### **January 8**

"God's Real Promise of Righteousness and Justice"  
Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz  
Jesus brings us righteousness and justice to restore bruised reeds and reignite faintly burning wicks.  
(Isaiah 42:1-9)

### **January 15**

"Looking For God? Look to the Lamb"  
Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz  
Jesus' love, suffering, sacrifice, and triumph are all expressed in that most precious of titles: the Lamb of God.  
(John 1:29-42)

### **January 22**

"The Word of the Cross - Power for Life"  
Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz  
To the world, Jesus seemed to be a loser. He suffered what all would consider defeat in order to win new life for you.  
(1 Corinthians 1:10-18)

**January 29**

"Our Foolishness, His Faithfulness"

Speaker Emeritus of The Lutheran Hour: Rev. Dr. Ken Klaus  
Many consider Christ's cross to be just so much foolishness.  
That is the worst foolishness of all.  
(1 Corinthians 1:18-31)

**WOMEN'S DEODORANT** is the item we are collecting this month for the Hygiene Pantry. Remember you can go to local stores and purchase this item for \$1, or if you don't want to shop you can help by making a contribution and labeling it for the Hygiene Pantry. The month of December we gave away 35 bags of hygiene items. We are grateful and very thankful for whatever you can do to help.

**THE GIVING TREE** – What a joy to see how so many opened their hearts to help others! Lots of little folks will be having new jackets, hats, mittens and boots for this winter. And all the extra items.....**THANK YOU! THANK YOU!** If there is anyone who would like to help with the Hygiene Pantry, please give me a call 734-2926 (Cinda). God's blessings!

Board of Evangelism

## Stewardship Corner

Celebrating New Year's is a celebration of the past and the future. We take stock of the past with thanksgiving and sometimes even relief (that it's over), and we look to the future in the hope and anticipation and perhaps even worry of what it holds. The point is that New Year's celebrations remind us of who we are as opposed to who we would like to be; what we have done in comparison to what we want to do. It reminds us of our accomplishments, but mostly it reminds us of our failures. What we've lost. Who we've lost. New Year's is our own version of Dickens' classic A Christmas Carol. And we all play Scrooge. We are visited by the ghosts of our pasts, presents, and futures. St. Paul writes: "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, 'He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.' He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God" (2 Cor 9:6-15). St. Paul tells us that the Lord of all will both supply and increase what you give to the church for its work in and for the world. He tells us that this work that God is doing in us will enrich and bless us in every way, and through this it will produce thanksgiving to God. With this in mind, here is some practical advice to help you take stock of your giving of years past, which will help you to change what

needs to be changed, improved, or done away with altogether. First, attend the Divine Service to receive God's gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. If you've not been faithful in attending worship to hear the preaching of God's Word, to receive forgiveness, and to feast on the rich food of our Lord's body and blood for the eternal benefit of your body and soul, then repent and come to receive the gifts God freely gives. God doesn't want your money. He wants you—all of you (Matt 22:20-22). Second, pray for the Lord's help. Your right as a Christian is to speak with your Father, the King of all creation, freely through His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Go to the throne of grace and ask for strength and wisdom to follow His bidding faithfully (John 15:1-16). Third, consider what the Church is and what the Church does. The Church is a mercy place. It inhales the mercy of the Father by the death, resurrection, and ascension of His Son through the preaching of the Gospel and the Sacraments. It exhales this mercy in love toward our neighbors. You are a member of the Church, of God's family. Thus, you are not only a recipient of God's mercy, but a bearer of that mercy for the life of the world. You spread that mercy in showing mercy through the generous giving of your income to support the work of the Church in and for the world, as the Israelites did in the Old Testament (Lev 27:1-34). Fourth, take stock of your current giving in light of the New Testament's teaching on supporting the work of the Church. Are you giving of your first fruits, taking it out of your paycheck first, or does God get what's left over? Are you giving voluntarily and cheerfully? Are you giving proportionally and generously? The Old Testament required a tithe, ten percent. The New Testament gives freedom to be generous, to give more for the Church's work. Are you relying on God's promise to provide and increase what you need to do His work? If your answer is no to any of these, repent. If God gave you His only Son, will He not provide for you all things, even physical things? Trust Him and His Word, and heed it. So, don't let your past define your future! Rather, commit for the year a generous proportion of your income, which is God's gift to you for this body and life.

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