

From the Pastor's Desk

Dear Friends in Christ,

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Stewards Transformed by Grace, Faith, and Love

The theme for this year's late winter-early spring stewardship emphasis was **Stewards Transformed by Grace, Faith, and Love**. We began this emphasis on Sunday, February 26, continued on Sunday, March 26, and concluded on Sunday, April 23. As God's people, we have been given the high honor of being His stewards. As His stewards, we are called to manage faithfully all with which we've been entrusted according to His will and benefit. Because of His generous gifts of grace, faith, and love, we can accomplish all that He asks us to do. He works in and through us as we become His hands, feet, and mouth.

In February, our focus was on God's undeserved kindness and love, which the Bible calls **grace**. In March, our focus was on **faith**. This month's focus is **love**. Love ought to follow faith. Love seeks the welfare of others: *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us"* (1 John 4:11-12). God's love in Christ compels us to do things that appear foolish to unbelievers. God's love prompts us to give freely of our time, talents, and treasures to help others and extend His kingdom.

A booklet of five accompanying **devotions** for this month's emphasis are available in the narthex; please take one home and consider incorporating it into your daily devotions. Copies of the brochure placed in your mailboxes at the end of February also remain available in the narthex.

What Happened to the "Contemporary" Service?

A number of you have either commented or asked in recent months about the fourth-Sunday service. Many of you who have done so have indicated that you miss the service and hope it returns and continues. Thank you for making a point of saying so. That is helpful feedback, and both the Board of Elders and our musicians welcome your continued input.

Not much has been said publicly at this point because it was never the intent to discontinue the fourth-Sunday

service permanently. However, last summer and early fall the Board of Elders was starting to hear a few more complaints than usual about a handful of aspects of that particular service. That has resulted in some ongoing discussion and a short break from the service while we attempt to figure out the best way to address the issues that have been raised.

In the coming months the Board of Elders is going to be asking for some specific feedback from the congregation. We would like to know, for example, what percentage of the congregation would like to see the fourth-Sunday service simply continue as is (or was). However, with the change in music personnel that occurred a couple of years back, the service does of course look and sound a little different than it used to. We would like to give our members an opportunity to provide some feedback about some of those changes. And we would also like to know what percentage of the congregation might be interested in seeing some additional changes considered.

All in all, the Board of Elders would like the congregation to help determine how to proceed with the fourth-Sunday service, or whatever alternatives we might wish to consider, in a way that furthers our congregation's ministry, taking into consideration not only our members' preferences but also the needs of potential visitors, and finally resulting in glory, honor, and praise to God. Please keep this aspect of our congregation's ministry in your personal prayers. And please keep your eyes and ears open in the coming weeks for ways to provide the desired feedback.

Positive Member Behaviors to Promote

At the March Voters Meeting, I shared the following information which I also shared at our annual Congregational Officer Orientation in January. I thought it was worth sharing with the entire congregation, as well.

In a recent article, entitled, "How to Deal with Conflict" (*The Parish Paper*, April 2016), the following is stated: "The first step is to accept that conflict is normal. ... Research shows that growing congregations exhibit and deal with more conflict than declining churches." In light of that fact, the article went on to suggest the following encouragement for congregations:

- **Every member's view is equally important.**
We need to allow room for disagreement.

- **Disagreements should remain public and “on the table.”** Avoiding disagreements for fear of causing disunity or hurt feelings is not preferable if it leads to “underground” conversations, which only intensify disagreements and make matters worse.
- **Always talk directly *with* others and avoid talking *about* others. Also, speak for yourself and not for others.** If you are speaking for others, facts and the names of specific people are better than saying “people are saying.”
- **Don’t rescue people who try to exert power and control through threats.** When a church yields to such threats, it is never a positive outcome.
- **Beware of “barking dogs.”** Sometimes churches have one or two members who seek attention and want to win any church fight just for the sake of winning. They are like barking dogs behind the fence when you are walking down the sidewalk. The more you acknowledge their negative noise outside of meetings, the more you encourage it. Don’t jump the fence and join them!
- **Don’t be a “rabbit” or a “skunk.”** Skunks stand their ground and fight in odorous ways. They use negative comments, label persons or groups with whom they disagree, or challenge personal motives and character. Most of us are rabbits that would rather run away from such personalities. We need to assert our right to express an opinion or viewpoint that is constructive. By speaking up for ourselves, we guarantee all opinions are part of the discussion.

In conclusion, the article observes, “When leaders and members faithfully fill their role as equal participants, set clear boundaries about acceptable church behavior, and create a culture where differences of opinion are expected, congregational life moves toward peaceful decision making.”

A Safe Space

I also shared the following quote at both the March Voters Meeting and the January Orientation meeting, which I believe is valuable food for thought with respect to what kind of congregation we wish to be:

“For me, the model of a place that welcomes people as they are is Alcoholics Anonymous. Everybody who goes says, “I’ve blown it,” and everyone else smiles and says, “Yeah, we know what that’s like. Come on in and join us.” Nobody tells anybody what to do; they just share what their struggles are and what they’ve found that helps and doesn’t help. Everybody’s open about their brokenness and failure, and they heal. That process is the only thing I know of that heals addictions. What happens in most of our churches is just the opposite. We all get dressed up on Sunday, and we go there and we say,

“Isn’t it great, all these good people!” So I don’t dare share my pain and my brokenness with you because you might reject me. We sit there with our pain and our brokenness, and we never share it and we don’t heal. Our church’s real challenge in the next decade or two is to find out how we can change from being congregations of pretense to being healing communities; we have to work toward becoming the kind of communities where it’s safe to tell your life story.” – quoted in Bruce Hartung, *Building Up the Body of Christ: Supporting Community Life in the Church*

Planning Team Update

At the March Voters Meeting I also shared the following goals of the Planning Team, which also serve as a summary of our recent discussions:

- Continue looking for ways to help the congregation be more outwardly-focused.
- Remember that our personal comfort can’t be at the expense of mission.
- Remember God’s faithfulness to our congregation in the past and, trusting Him, be bold with respect to the future, rather than simply trying to protect what we have.
- Celebrate that we have been doing more serving and mission-oriented activities as a congregation over the last several years.
- At the same time, ask how we can reach new people that we aren’t currently reaching: To do this we may need to start an entirely new ministry that we haven’t even thought of yet.

As always, interested members are more than welcome to become involved in this process. The Planning Team currently meets on the third Thursday of every month at 7:15 p.m.

The Church Refused to Look Like the Community

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*. As I’ve mentioned the last couple of months, I’d like to continue to use this space to share a few thoughts from the book with the entire congregation.

In Chapter 4, the author observes that dying churches, whereas they once may have been a part of the community and reflected the community, often have refused to change along with the community around them. On those rare occasions they have attempted to reach out, rather than going into the community, they have asked the community residents to come to them. “Our doors are always open,” someone might say. “People know where to find us if they’re interested.”

Referring to the image of a fortress, which exists to keep people and possessions on the inside safe and to keep people on the outside out, the author suggests that dying

churches, while they may deny it, often operate in such a way. People in the community often do not feel welcome inside. And those already inside are more concerned about protecting the way they do things than reaching the residents of the community. To many members, the thought of making significant changes in order to reach and impact the community is just too frightening.

By contrast, whenever local churches are mentioned in the New Testament, they are always exhorted to be other-centered. In Philippians 2:4, for example, Paul says, "Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." That is how vibrant and living churches operate. They are concerned about their communities, and they demonstrate that concern in the way they carry out their ministry.

Dying churches are more concerned with self-preservation and a certain way of doing things. At some point, they stop reaching and caring for the community and become self-centered and self-gratifying. God has called the church, however, to look outwardly.

Are we placing a priority here at Peace upon reaching the people in our community and making them feel welcome? Even if that might mean giving up our own preferred way of doing things? How might we become more others-centered? And how might we be more intentional about looking outwardly rather than inwardly?

Once again, I invite you to make the prayer at the close of Chapter 4 your own:

Prayer

God, give our congregation and me a heart for our community. Let us see the people around us through Your eyes. And give us the courage and the wisdom to let go of "our" church, so that others who best reflect our community can lead us and teach us. Amen.

Chapter 5 of the book is entitled, "The Budget Moved Inwardly." I will plan to share a few thoughts from that chapter in next month's column.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

In His Service,

Pastor Derek Riddle

Directory App: Another reminder that our new pictorial directory is also available as an App on mobile devices. The Universal Church Directory App may be downloaded on the App Store or on Google Play. Once the App is installed, you will

need a unique identifier code in order to access the App for the first time. This code is available in the church office upon request to all members who were photographed. (Members who were not photographed should be able to borrow a code from a member who was photographed.) You may call or stop by the church to request your code, or send an E-mail to peace@peacelcms.org.

Board of Elders

The Board of Elders meets on the first Tuesday of every month (unless we need to change the date for one reason or another). Our May meeting will be the second Tuesday (May 9th) because Pastor will be in Chicago at a Pastoral Leadership Institute Class. Our meeting time has been changed to 6:30 p.m. because we now have a Bible study before our meeting begins.

We welcome our new members, Bob and Shirley Haan by Adult Confirmation, and John Junker & Brandon McCormick by Profession of Faith to Peace Lutheran Church. Welcome, Brothers and Sister in Christ.

Time keeps going on. We just finished with Lent and Easter. We went through the suffering of Jesus, which leads us into the celebration of His rising on Easter morning. It was a great joy seeing the church filled with all the people hearing God's Word and celebrating the resurrection of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Elders are encouraged to pray for the members in their zone and make contacts with them, and some members are being visited. Please include the Elders in your daily prayers. If you would like a visit or know of someone who would like a visit, don't hesitate; please call an Elder. Elders' names and phone numbers are on the bulletin board between the two office doors.

We haven't had a Contemporary service in some time. The Elders and Musicians had a meeting in March. We would like congregational input to hear your ideas/thoughts for a Contemporary service. The Elders are working on a survey for the congregation and it will be given out soon. Until then, if you want to give any input, you may do so by letter or by talking to an Elder any time. May the Lord guide us as we move forward with our Contemporary service.

Keep Pastor and family in your prayers as he travels to Chicago this week.

From the Board of Evangelism:

On April 23 the Board of Evangelism members hosted a **Ladies Afternoon** as a way for the ladies from our congregation (who give a lot of their time in service for our church) to have some fun *not working*, but just laughing and enjoying each others' company. The lady from Cobbygoose in Alpena instructed us in painting a "Faith" stencil; it was VERY easy, and the results were amazing! If you're on Facebook, pictures are on Peace's Facebook page, where you can see the ladies posing with their creations. Many have already expressed an interest in doing something like this in the future, so we will be looking into that. Oh, and LOTS of wonderful desserts were served also...can't forget the treats! Thank you to all who helped in any way!

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/.

May 7

"The Abundant Life of Grace"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz
Don't leave God's grace behind! We are still sheep who need the Good Shepherd.
(John 10:1-10)

May 14

"To Know God, Look to Jesus"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz
To be saved by Jesus Christ is not religion--it is reliance upon God's grace, God's doing, and God's amazing love for you.
(John 14:1-14)

May 21

"Comfort in the Spirit for Our Spirits"

Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz
To be the people God created us to be, we must be connected to His power, to His Word, by His Spirit.
(John 14:15-21)

May 28

"The Best of Things in the Worst of Times"

Speaker Emeritus of The Lutheran Hour: Rev. Dr. Ken Klaus
As another generation comes along that knows not the Lord or what He has done, God enables His people to do the best of things in the worst of times.
(Philippians 1:27)

Stewardship Corner

"It is more blessed to give than to receive," said St. Paul, quoting our Lord (Acts 20:35). How can this be?

Jesus and His disciples withdrew to a mountain by the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The crowds followed them, for the Lord had just showered upon them the gift of His teaching, the gift of His Word. But the day was waning; the sun was setting, and it was getting late. Looking upon the crowds, Jesus had compassion on them and asked, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat" (John 6:5)? Philip said that two hundred denarii (a day's wages for two hundred men) could not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.

But Andrew, Peter's brother, brought a young boy forward, who had five barley loaves and two small fish. "But," Andrew asked, "what are they for so many" (John 6:9). Jesus replied, "Have the people sit down" (John 6:10).

Then Jesus, the Son of God, gave them a second gift, a gift only He could give—a gift from above. He took the bread and the fish, gave thanks, blessed them, and distributed them to the crowd. Then came the miracle. As these five loaves and two fish were given out, they multiplied. He fed the hungry crowd until they were all full. And twelve baskets full were left over.

But Jesus was not the only one who gave that day. There is one person who also gave from what he had. It was the boy with the five loaves and the two fish. All the others, including the boy, received the gift of a miraculous feast. And they would look back on it with wonder. But the boy, when he would look back on it, would look back and remember not just what he received. He would look back with wonder and delight when the Son of God made his gift into something miraculous. For it is more blessed to give than to receive.

This our Lord does for each of us. He presses our gifts, no matter how big or how small, into His service and works wonders with them. He provides through what we give: water for baptism, bread and wine for the Lord's Supper, a man called and sent for the preaching of the Gospel and Absolution. He provides a building in which we can gather as His children, lights so that we might not gather in darkness. He provides funds for the care of the poor and struggling, for missionaries who preach and teach beyond our borders. He makes Christians, disciples of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ in our midst by bringing them to faith and nurturing them in that faith. He takes our gifts and turns them into something miraculous.

Indeed, it is more blessed to give than to receive. Thus we give. We give of what we have. And the Lord works His wonders.

Taken from www.lcms.org