



ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH LOVELETTER

Share God's Love; Serve all People

329 East State Street, Mason City, IA 50401

641-423-7749

OFFICE HOURS: Monday-Friday 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

December 2020

Christ Truly Present: In, With, and Under the Virtual Community

Can we get past a semantic hurdle right from the start? “Virtual” does not mean “fake.” Virtual Worship, while different than the in-person worship we have all been used to for generations, is not “less than” in-person worship, nor is it “not *real* worship,” especially if you are someone for whom virtual is your only means of participating in the body of Christ as you live your faith in the world.

Back in March, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton wrote a thoughtful and heartfelt pastoral letter regarding worship and the sharing of communion through virtual means. At that time, she urged us all to fast-together as we explored our theological practices regarding communion. Bishop Eaton wrote,

We recommend that we do not urge people to employ virtual communion, that deacons, pastors, and bishops use this time as a teaching moment about the Lutheran understanding of the Word of God, that we make use of the Service of the Word and Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Night Prayer and Responsive Prayer, that we spend time in scripture study, that we pray for each other, and that we contact others regularly by phone, email, or social media.

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's Message on COVID-19 - Let us fast from Holy Communion

I find that in so many ways, Bishop Eaton was correct, back in March. I think in the long run, this time of fasting and this disruption of communion practice will likely be of benefit to us as we have taken the time to prayerfully and carefully consider the hows and whys of our various communion practices throughout differing Christian traditions. But now that we find ourselves facing another, unknown time of gathering virtually “as the church” when we cannot safely gather in person, we have taken a long hard look at our practices and thinking about Holy Communion.

Many of you likely grew up celebrating communion once a month in church. Now we have done such a good job of encouraging our people to receive the sacrament more frequently that many, if not most, of our congregations are celebrating weekly communion! Though the pandemic-forced physical distancing has interrupted this practice, the scriptures promise (Romans 8:39) that this will not separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

For such a time as this – in which the way of being church together has changed and is being challenged by the realities of the world around us – setting the communion table virtually provides a connection for our congregational members, especially as we move forward in figuring out together what it means to be the “church becoming” in and through Christ, especially as we work to be better together than we can be on our own.

I know that there are those who are worried that “a virtual communion” might replace “traditional practices” and allow some to commune virtually after the pandemic is over. And to be honest, with so many in the community of Christ who are not able to “come to church” as they once did, I from a pastoral perspective am not sure that widening Christ’s table this way is a bad thing, especially as it provides more opportunity to reach more people in real time in a time of change and crisis beyond anything we have experienced before. While I acknowledge these concerns for the traditional practices, and recognize they should be a part of future discussions, I see the value for the whole church to not dismiss new ways of sharing Christ’s table just because we haven’t done it this way before.

For us, in our worshipping community, we will work to find ways to bring clarity in how we share the supper virtually. As a medium to reach our homebound and most vulnerable participants, this seems a practical way to share communion with the entire community. To share communion in real time becomes a true gift for those who are unable to be with the other members in the body of Christ. Would this be “less meaningful” or “sacred” that the word of God might make holy the ordinary bread and drink that you have in your homes, rather than elements prayed over and consecrated by a pastor earlier and brought to you? The practice of widening the table of Christ through virtual assembly is a clear and very real reminder that there is no ‘magic’ in the words or people presiding, no right or wrong in the bread or drink, that Jesus really and truly is present in, with, and under the words of grace and in the eating and drinking of the elements, and we know this all to be true JUST BECAUSE HE PROMISES.

As much friendship and camaraderie as I personally have experienced through virtual groups, I have to admit that virtual community can’t be a total replacement for in-person community, especially for faith and religious practice. Yet we have to be keenly aware that there will always be some unable to join us in-person as the body of Christ at work in the world, assembled and held together by the Holy Spirit. The faithful and welcoming body of Christ has always embraced finding ways to reach out to those who for various reasons are physically unable to attend.

The beauty of the virtual world is that we have the opportunity to be better together in a way that previous generations could not have dreamed or imagined, and then we can reach beyond these new technologies when it is again safe and find deeper touch points to grow our community built upon the foundation of a virtual relationship that has already been started. Our most vulnerable populations now have the opportunity to come and be a part of the community actively and in real time. And as scary as it might be for some Lutherans, I do like to remind people that the E in ELCA stands for evangelism, and point out that this opens up new possibilities for outreach in teaching and proclaiming the love of Christ at work in with and under each of us, as we are fed through his very real presence in, with, under and through the ordinary bread and drink we share as his communing community.

I hope to “see” you online and share in his grace-filled communion with you soon.

Peace in Christ,

Pastor Matthew Muters

All worship services and daily devotions can be found on St Paul’s Facebook page and on YouTube. For more information or help in accessing it please contact Diane at 641-512-5851.

COUNCIL MINUTES—November 12, 2020

Attendance: the following council members were present for the meeting: Dave Janssen, Pat Steinfort, Kristen Stockberger, Linda Koopman, Pastor Muters, and Bryan Bjorklund. Visitors the meeting were: Ron and Becky Lundblad, Sue Aves, Carlyn Schriver, Dennis and Nancy Marsh, Jim and Diane Murphy, Lori Angell, and Roger Ennis

Devotion: Pastor opened with a devotion.

Pastor's Report: Reflected on how meeting as a congregation really was the best medicine for our congregation. Research on how to restart other mission work is being discussed with other pastors. A lot of the pastoral care is work done over the phone. In regards to Covid, many concerns people had were related to the fatigue and seemingly never-ending reality of the virus. How we communicate in a very clear manner is useful, especially when we don't have direct conversations with each other. How we are going to move forward as a church with OSLC and our relationship was a very important and timely endeavor.

Guest Speakers: Ron Lundblad came and talked about the difficult times we are going through as a church, state, and country. He presented a nicely done write-up (ask SPLC Office for a copy - with seven main points). To start the meeting, Ron noted the month of October was the lowest offering amount we have had in any sort of recent history. This prompted him to come talk to the council. A point Ron stressed was the current agreement between two churches is the best path towards surviving. The following people Dennis, Carlyn, Diane, Lori, and Sue talked about different topics such as the layout of SPLC, how SPLC was formed, how the actual plan put into place would be useful for SPLC and OSLC, what the interpretations of SPLC and OSLC looked like initially, the process of even selling or buying church real estate looks like, and numerous people talked about the need and success of the calling tree. Discussions were held over the topics introduced.

Worship Plan: Diane talked about the church service for December and the layout. People would come in the middle door and up into the church. Wheelchair entry and exit would be at the last door with the machine laid out. We would exit out the front door. Ron Lundblad was willing to do the locking and unlocking of the church in December. Accompanists for December and Christmas Eve are lined up. Come January 1, there is a shortage of accompanists.

Comments about October Joint Council Meeting: Dave, Linda, and Pat talked about how the joint council meeting went well. OSLC does have to have additional talks about what they see moving forward with specifics to be discussed later.

New Business

Diane's Resignation: Dave talked about a possible option that could be a unique situation. It would not be a permanent solution but something useful for the time being. It is going to be discussed in more detail later.

Snow Removal: Last year done was by Rite-Way Lawn, this is going to be done the same. It is recommended we maintain the front area due to structural issues. Although the north steps are difficult to maintain, they are going to be done for structural, legal, and first glance reasons.

Action Committee: They did not meet in October. The committee feels they are torn between those people who want stuff to happen and there are people who do not want stuff to happen. Obviously, Covid-19 put a huge damper on the whole process. The discussion was on whether or not to continue meeting if there is not any movement in this direction.

Council Discussion: Very few people have expressed interest in joining the church council. As it is, there will only be two people for council next year. Discussions for alternative meeting times and locations (after church, downstairs, upstairs, or other).

Secretary's Report: No minutes were taken as there were no votes taken as only three council members present.

Treasurer's Report: October was the smallest amount of giving. Motion Dave, second Kristen, all in favor.

Next Meeting: Sunday, December 12, 2020 after church with a targeted start time of 10:00 AM.

Motion to Adjourn: Motion Kristen, second Linda, all in favor.

In your service,
Bryan C. Bjorklund

WELCA DISBURSEMENTS

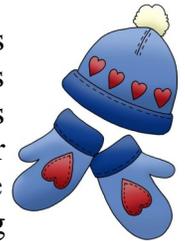
Each year our wonderful Women of the ELCA make contributions to multiple organizations as an outreach of the ministry of St Paul. They met in November and the following is a list of their gifts for 2020.

ELCA Good Gifts—2 goats	\$100.00
Brentwood Lutheran Services	\$100.00
Caring Pregnancy Center	\$100.00
Hawkeye Harvest Food Bank	\$100.00
House of Hope Women's Shelter	\$100.00
Lutheran Social Services	\$100.00
Lutheran World Relief	\$100.00
Northern Lights Men's Homeless Shelter	\$100.00
Rural Outreach Dental Clinic	\$100.00
Salvation Army	\$100.00
Northern Light Alliance for the Homeless (Vets)	\$100.00
Cerro Gordo County Veterans' Affairs	\$100.00
St Paul Lutheran Church	\$100.00

Thank you ladies for your generous support of the community!

MITTEN AND HAT TREE REQUEST

Especially during this difficult time there are still children in need of warm mittens and hats to get through the winter. Even though you can't see the mitten tree that is typically on the Narthex we are still collecting these needed items. If you have hats or mittens that you would like to donate please contact either Geri Barker (423-5525) or Diane Murphy (641-512-5851) and they will make arrangements to pick them up. All hats and mittens will be donated to Harding School after the holidays.



GIVING TREE

Good Morning!

In previous years Our Saviour's congregation has been able to bless many families in need through the Salvation Army's gift program. I know I always enjoyed picking an ornament from the tree and buying a gift, knowing it would help a family in need. The logistics of doing a giving tree this year in the midst of a pandemic have prevented us from providing this type of service through the Salvation Army. However, we have still been given an opportunity to help one family connected to our church!

The family in need is a single mom of three children in our community. I have been given the ages and wants of each family member. Another blessing we can provide is assistance with their Alliant Energy bill which is currently past due. If you would like to help with this effort please send any donation to either church office with the designation "Christmas Giving Tree". You could also provide gift cards noting the same designation. I will then be happy to do the online shopping/wrapping for this family. If you are uncomfortable donating money but would rather buy an item, please contact me and I would be happy to give you an item to buy.

We are trying to remain diligent in our efforts to be generous while remaining safe and healthy during this unprecedented global pandemic. Any money leftover from your collective donations will be equally split between the "Assistance" funds at each church (*given to families in the form of gift cards for groceries*).

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me via phone or email anytime. My contact information is:

Yvette Muters (641)425-3865 pwymuters@yahoo.com

Thank you for considering this opportunity. God's Blessings to you all this Advent Season!

Sincerely,

Yvette Muters

TIME TO SAY GOOD BYE



I have given my resignation as your church secretary to the church council and will be finished on December 30, 2020. I have enjoyed my time back on staff at St Paul but I am now ready to begin fulltime retirement. In some ways this was a difficult decision but as I look around my house and see all my "projects" it became an easier decision.

Thank you for your support and hope to see you soon in worship!

Diane Murphy

While we may not be able to be physically together for Advent and Christmas Eve you will all be in our thoughts and prayers. Enjoy your families and friends and stay safe and healthy.

Merry Christmas!



Worship Resources for December

Sunday, December 6, 2020 Second Sunday of Advent

Prayer of the Day

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming strengthen us to serve you with purified lives; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Readings and Psalm

Isaiah 40:1-11 *Good news of God's coming to a people in exile*

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 Righteousness shall prepare a pathway for God.

2 Peter 3:8-15a *Waiting for and hastening the day of God*

Mark 1:1-8 *John appears from the wilderness*

Sunday, December 13, 2020 Third Sunday of Advent**Prayer of the Day**

Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our ears to the words of your prophets, that, anointed by your Spirit, we may testify to your light; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Readings and Psalms

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 *Righteousness and praise flourish like a garden*

Psalms 126 The LORD has done great things for us.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 *Kept in faith until the coming of Christ*

John 1:6-8, 19-28 *A witness to the light*

Sunday, December 20, 2020 Fourth Sunday of Advent**Prayer of the Day**

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that would obstruct your mercy, that willingly we may bear your redeeming love to all the world, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Readings and Psalms

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 *The LORD's promise to David*

Luke 1:46b-55 You, Lord, have lifted up the lowly.

Romans 16:25-27 *The mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ*

Luke 1:26-38 *The angel appears to Mary*

Thursday, December 24, 2020 Nativity of Our Lord I: Christmas Eve**Prayer of the Day**

Almighty God, you made this holy night shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that here on earth we may walk in the light of Jesus' presence and in the last day wake to the brightness of his glory; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Readings and Psalm

Isaiah 9:2-7 *Light shines: a child is born for us*

Psalms 96 Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad.

Titus 2:11-14 *The grace of God has appeared*

Luke 2:1-14 [15-20] *God with us*

Sunday, December 27, 2020 First Sunday of Christmas**Prayer of the Day**

Almighty God, you wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and yet more wonderfully restored it. In your mercy, let us share the divine life of the one who came to share our humanity, Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Readings and Psalm

Isaiah 61:10--62:3 *Clothed in garments of salvation*

Psalms 148 The splendor of the LORD is over earth and heaven.

Galatians 4:4-7 *Children and heirs of God*

Luke 2:22-40 *The presentation of the child*

It's important to pray for ALL our family & friends, so our list is rotated among our congregation.

Keep this in a convenient place for prayer time. If you don't have a daily prayer time, this might be a good time to begin.

1. NE Iowa Synod
2. St. Paul Lutheran Church
3. Our Saviour's Lutheran Church
4. Our government, military leaders, troops & families
5. All who suffer from illness, infirmity or loneliness
6. Confined shut-ins (home, hospital, nursing home)
7. Those who are dealing with losses in their lives
8. All who hunger and/or are homeless
9. All who seek God; finding comfort, peace, renewal
10. Pat Steinfort & family
11. Ian & Kristen Stockberger & family
12. Micah & Jessica Stockberger & family
13. Larry & Deb Stockberger & family
14. Bryan & Michele Thenhaus & family
15. Bob & Heather Thompson & family
16. Ken & Dawn Truka & family
17. Jim & Chris Wallace & family
18. Karol Wallskog & family
19. Tom & Patricia Wetter & family
20. Jim & Elaine Aberg & family
21. Lori Angell & family
22. Michael Angell & family
23. Stephanie & Shaun Arneson & family
24. Susan Aves & family
25. Jim & JoEllen Bailey & family
26. Don & Geri Barker & family
27. Dane Birkholz & family
28. Bryan & Bethany Bjorklund & family
29. Lyle & Corrine Butler & family
30. Karen Cornick & family
31. Zell Cottrell & family

PRAYER CHAIN

Please call any Prayer Chain member below if you have a prayer request. All requests are kept confidential and you can share as much information as you are comfortable with. You may call any member and they will start the chain.

Prayer Chain members:

Geri Barker 641-423-5525

(please do not leave message)

Anne Gannett 641-421-6852 (leave message)

Margaret Movick 641-201-1250

(leave message)

Diane Murphy 641-512-5851

(leave message)

Happy December Birthday!

12/02 Annika Angell

12/09 Corrine Butler

12/14 Dixie Howell

12/17 Margaret Movick

12/21 Elle Buffington

12/29 Brianna Buffington

12/31 Jim Aberg

