



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 through Friday 9 a.m. to Noon

July 2020

SHARING A LITTLE SECRET

There's a bit of a secret that most religious leaders would rather not get out into the general public knowledge. This is sort of one of those "magicians never reveal how they do a trick" sort of things. You see, people look to pastors for answers, for support, for hope and for all sorts of things when they find themselves in times of need, and rightly so much of the time. Good pastors have good insights into many things in life. Pastors often approach situations that are completely befuddling to most people and we come into the situation, look the situation over, and after a bit of prayer and what we like to call (at least among Lutherans) the "mutual conversation and consultation of the Saints," we come up with words or ways to approach what is happening that are actionable or acceptable to those who are dealing with whatever it is that is happening around them.

But what most people don't know is happening in the midst of all of this, is that the Pastor, or at least if I speak for myself, I am just as anxious, just as hurting, just as confused and lost as just about anyone in these situations. In my role as Pastor, I've come to understand that I am called to be the non-anxious presence that takes a step back from all those feelings, even and maybe especially from what I AM feeling, to seek God's Will and Ways towards light and life in a time of darkness and death.

When we come to the things that are happening in the world around us currently, with all the anxiety and all the ways the world is mourning and moaning and groaning and hungering for hope, I truly feel I have to admit that in just such times as these, we Pastors are just like you, and we are making it all up as we go along!

We don't have some sort of direct "Bat Phone" line to God that gets our prayers heard and answered quicker or with more positive results. We don't have an answer key to all the difficult questions that we are all facing that we can turn to the back of the book and help you check your work or give you the right answer if you are stuck. What we are doing as we Shepherd and accompany you in and through all you are facing is seeking God's will with you and for you alongside you all the way. And while I cannot for sure tell you each step of the path ahead of us, there are a few things that I would like to help you see and understand.

Being faithful followers of Christ, living as church just got a lot harder. Although we can still say that 'prayer, and the ministry of the Word' remain central, we are all having to completely rethink how we "come together" and work together in mission and ministry in constantly changing and uncertain circumstances. And if you're like me, this is quickly growing tiring. Tiring because everything we do needs evaluating, in the full knowledge that next week it will need reevaluating and likely require changing.

So, what can we trust in this time? First and foremost, we must work to model trust in God's grace & goodness. We need to root our lives in our confession of Christ as our saviour and our faith in the Word as life-giving. We need to go back to the very thing that we have taught children for generations... the Church is NOT a building where people go to pray, it's not built out of sticks and stones, it's not built out of clay... **FOR WE ARE THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF OUR LORD, WE ARE ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, WE HAVE BEEN RESTORED.**

Yes we have been restored, and we are being reshaped to be the body of Christ in this world where change hits hard and fast; where the things that we used to count on as moorings and secure answers or foundations for community are shifting. Where the answers we seek are harder to work out because the exact questions being asked aren't even clear; and where the number of factors that are influencing and affecting our life and our ministry decisions are innumerable, and each and every one is hard and important.

We have some hard and important questions ahead of us as two congregations being called to work together as one community in Christ. The only way we're going to find faithful answers is not by trying to figure out what we'll do to please the most people or at least anger the fewest, we can only move forward in this calling to be the Christian community together by seeking God's will together. To do that, we have to work together to help each other see and hear God's vision and voice.

When the world's ways get in the way of this there are a few things we can fall back on together. When the world's ways bring about volatility, and they will, we respond with honest vision and vulnerability that proclaims over and over the promises upon which we are relying. When the happenings in the world or in our own community leave us feeling uncertain, we must gather around God's Word and share the trustworthiness of our Lord that we have come to know and in which we believe. God has been good to those who have struggled in times like this throughout history, do we not trust that God will be and do good to us and for us, in just such times as these as well? When everything happening in the world leaves people feeling confused or arguing about who is right and wrong, it is important we work to be as informed as possible and that we then engage people directly. In the midst of complexity, it is vital that we respond with directness and connection.

And as we struggle with the ambiguity of everything happening around us, it is vital that we take everything that we are learning and doing and make it clear and understandable to everyone. We take the visions, and the promises and the plans and we engage people in a way that is clear, concise, and understandable. We make it clear how we are inviting them to be a part of everything that is happening, and we make it clear what they can count on us for -- what they can count on the community for -- as well. We can't avoid the shifting sands and the clouds of confusion that lead to a great deal of conflict in the world and in our community around us. But we can control how we respond and what questions we ask to help lead us to a faithful path of following Christ.

I hope this primer can help you as we move forward:

When dealing with Vulnerability: Be Reliable

Ask: What promises do you need to keep in this situation?

When facing Uncertainty: Be Trustworthy

Ask: How can you engage people?

When wrestling with Complexity: Be Direct

Ask: What information do people need to have?

When arguing over Ambiguity: Be Understandable

Ask: What is the most compelling manner to articulate your vision?

May the Peace of Christ Guard your Hearts and Minds,
Pastor Matthew Muters

TRACKS for our “Call To Love Thy Neighbor” Program

We are hoping to expand our outreach with better digital and virtual opportunities for worship and gatherings and we need your help. The Call to Love Thy Neighbor program is in response to the changes we have made to continue as a community worshipping and supporting our neighbors which includes not only the family next door but you, me and all those connected to Our Saviour’s and St Paul. Beyond Covid 19 we have people that struggle in winter to get to worship and this will give them an opportunity to stay connected .

To make this successful we need people to step forward and help in one of several ways. The following Tracks are how we are organizing the Call to Love Thy Neighbor program. Track 3 is already set with the members that are the Action Team. Tracks 1 and 2 are new but are key to keeping worship available during the Pandemic for those more comfortable staying home but will also meet the needs of those unable to come to the buildings for a variety of reasons in the future. All of these tracks are running simultaneously, the numbers are just a reference point and do not denote importance. Please contact the church office if you would like to be a part of this new and exciting ministry.

TRACK 1 – Enhance Digital Worship and Outreach

This will require a Worship Ministry Team of people to focus on involving more people in readings, worship and producing of worship both outside and indoors when it is possible. Team members will help design visual pieces that will include readings and hymn lyrics, etc. They will also help with recording and posting worship services. We would like a team of 6-8 people to share in the work. This may include the current Worship Team, but it needs additional support. The more people that help the lighter the workload. If you would enjoy searching and developing worship resources, then we need your help. Computer experience is helpful, but love of worship is required.

TRACK 2 – Technology Expansion - development and expansion of the use and acquisition of technology.

This will help both with track 1 but also with moving into the future and further digital outreach for those who are unable to return to worship right away for personal or health-risk reasons. This is a new team that will focus on using and expanding how we use technology for ministry. Responsibilities will include learning to use the microphone and video equipment as well as recording services so they can be posted online. This new team should include 1-2 council members and 1-3 congregation members.

TRACK 3 – Action Team continues meeting utilizing survey to keep moving forward supported by servant leaders and congregation members of both congregations.

This track underlines everything we are doing to move forward and needs to be aware of the work of other teams

Have questions or to step forward call the church office.

CONGRATULATIONS ELLE BUFFINGTON!



Elle Buffington, daughter of Stephanie Arneson and granddaughter of Jim & JoEllen Bailey, graduated from MCHS this spring. An Open House is planned for Elle on Saturday, July 25 from 11am-1pm at the Mason City Commerce Center, 9 North Federal Avenue (Chamber Building). Please stop by and congratulate Elle or send her a card at 950 7th Street SE, Mason City.

St Paul Lutheran Church Council Minutes—June 11, 2020

Attendance - the following members were present for the meeting: Pastor Muters, Jim Aberg, Linda Koopman, Pat Steinfort, Ron Lundbland and Bryan Bjorklund.

Devotion - Pastor shared a devotion discussion topic about churches during Covid-19. It was written from a perspective of the story of a family experiencing church reopening - the connection we all miss, the connection we all still have with each other, and the impact it all has on us in the present and future..

Pastor's Report - Pastor has had a very difficult time getting all the needed information ahead of time to fulfill his pastoral duties (due to Covid-19 and the lack of connection we all used to have in regards to how communication worked). Although playing "pastor" usually is acting to events that come up, this is augmented more than usual. Pastor has been working with our leaders on three items: 1.) building up on digital outreach for service, 2.) technology (how to use it, where the money comes from for it), and 3.) getting the action team up and running. Obviously, working with the action team is a constant adjustment as the pertinent information is always changing and hearing the voice of our parish.

Secretary's Report - All approved ahead of time via email.

Treasurer's Report - SPLC offerings were down considerably from the previous months as compared to prior years (around \$9,800). The written in part is the actual offering numbers, while the PPP is the inflated amount (the crossed-out part). Motion Jim, second Pat, all in favor.

Monthly Local and Global Benevolence - The local benevolence is used for Our Savior Lutheran Church for their "My Little Pantry" in front of the church and for the Foodbank (this replaces the global benevolence). Motion Ron, second Jim; all in favor.

Old Business

Roof, Eaves, Lawn - The roof did not leak from what the issue was before. This does not mean it is solved long-term, but well enough for now. The eaves that needed it were cleaned out and replaced the bottom half. Bryan will plan to mow the lawn (will reach out to others if help is needed).

Cannonball Days - Moved back from June to August 29. This was a success last year, obviously depending on COVID-19. Some are pulling out, while some are still waiting.

PPP - This is the federal government program called Payment Protection Plan, which is designated for non-profit businesses during the COVID-19 for the SPLC employees (Diane and Ben). The amount awarded was \$4,500 (there is a formula involved). We started it at the end of April and it will be done for SPLC at the end of July. A detailed outline is provided to where and what the money is going to/from. Dave and Linda went over to OSLC to talk about the topic and OSLC did reconsider how it worked out between the churches (see last month's minutes). It is a great example of two churches working together through a potentially difficult situation.

Resuming Church Services - The worship team gave the idea to discuss back to the church council. Reality is that church "as we knew it" is still quite a ways away. Outdoors is the most likely reason for a church service. A meeting with both councils on what the future of service would look like is the next step. Deliberate planning in agreement between SPLC and OSLC is needed in alignment with all of the information provided in accordance with the numbers. Specifically, we need worship ministers to help make this a reality - especially if we are saying we want worship back.

Next Meeting - Thursday July 9 at 6:30 PM

Motion to Adjourn - Motion Bryan, second Jim, all in favor.

In your service,
Bryan C. Bjorklund



THANK YOU FROM GOOD SHEPHERD

We received a thank you from the staff of Good Shepherd for the monetary gift that was used to treat their staff to a brownie ice cream sundae bar. The staff was most appreciative! This wonderful gift was a gift from the church council on behalf of the congregation.

Joint Council Meeting St Paul and Our Saviour's June 20, 2020

Present: President Ed Simon, Vice President Mike Olson, Secretary Nancy Nielsen, Liz Hasty, Jan Nelson, Ron Rachut, Donna Vosburgh, Jim Aberg, Dave Janssen, Linda Koopman, Pat Steinfert, Pastor Muters.
Absent: Randy Gourley, Myrna Klemesrud, Bryan Bjorklund, Ron Lundblad, Kristen Stockberger. *Also Present:* Diane Murphy, Ministry Administrator at St Paul

The question of the meeting is when/how are we going to get back to person-to-person worship?

Overview of phases to move forward. If numbers reported increase, we can return to 'Safer at Home' – nothing is "set in stone," we just don't know – we must remain flexible. Diane gave us an overview of the "Call to Love Thy Neighbor" document. We all must remember that things will be different. She encouraged all to read the document completely at home. A motion made by Jim A./Ron R. to adopt this written guideline as a fluid document, subject to change as we continue. The joint councils will approve changes as they become necessary. Motion carried.

Tracks for our Call to Love Thy Neighbor outreach –

- Track 1: Enhance digital worship and outreach. A team to focus on additional people to be involved in worship – worship ministry team plus additional members and support. Jim A. volunteered, would like one more from Our Saviour's.
- Track 2: Technology expansion – need volunteers.
- Track 3: Action Team – continues to move forward.

We will have an outdoor worship service at the green space at the old Madison School area. June 28 at 9:00 am. Please bring a lawn chair. If it rains – no person to person worship.

We will continue the online worship that is available to people who are uncomfortable or cannot attend the in-person service.

The meeting closed with prayer.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Nielsen, Secretary

North Iowa Community Action Organization Cares Act Funding

NICAO has funding available to help individuals during the pandemic who are at or below 200% of federal poverty level, and need assistance with overdue: rent, water/sewer bills, or childcare bills. In addition, funds are available for emergency assistance to support individuals who are required to self-isolate or quarantine due to the virus. To receive assistance individuals will be required to complete an eligibility application with verification of income at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. During July in Cerro Gordo county call the Family Resource Center at 641-423-7766.

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.

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| 1. NE Iowa Synod | 16. Lori Angell & family |
| 2. St. Paul Lutheran Church | 17. Michael Angell & family |
| 3. Our Saviour's Lutheran Church | 18. Stephanie & Shaun Arneson & family |
| 4. Our government, military leaders, troops & families | 19. Susan Aves & family |
| 5. All who suffer from illness, infirmity or loneliness | 20. Jim & JoEllen Bailey & family |
| 6. Confined shut-ins (home, hospital, nursing home) | 21. Don & Geri Barker & family |
| 7. Those who are dealing with losses in their lives | 22. Bryan & Bethany Bjorklund & family |
| 8. All who hunger and/or are homeless | 23. Lyle & Corrine Butler & family |
| 9. All who seek God; finding comfort, peace, renewal | 24. Karen Cornick & family |
| 10. Ken & Dawn Truka & family | 25. Zell Cottrell & family |
| 11. Jim & Chris Wallace & family | 26. LaVern & Tanya Dahl & family |
| 12. Karol Wallskog & family | 27. Roger & Beverly Ennis & family |
| 13. Tad Wendorf & family | 28. Harold Gaiser & family |
| 14. Tom & Patricia Wetter & family | 29. Jack & Anne Gannett & family |
| 15. Jim & Elaine Abegr & family | 30. Jean Harms & family |
| | 31. Kay Harms & 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 July Birthday!

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|------|-------------------|
| 7/3 | Nancy Marsh |
| 7/4 | Carol Meyer |
| 7/8 | Pat Steinfort |
| 7/10 | Briella Bjorklund |
| 7/11 | Jim Murphy |
| 7/18 | Ian Stockberger |
| 7/21 | Patricia Wetter |
| 7/23 | Remy Slocum |
| 7/29 | Dave Janssen |

