

MAY 2023 VOL 65 NO. 11

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

"...The Scripture Cannot Be Broken." (John 10:35)



*He sets the solitary in
FAMILIES*



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The Lutheran Spokesman (USPS 825580) (ISSN 00247537) is published monthly by the Church of the Lutheran Confession, 501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI 54701, and is an official organ of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). Website address: www.clclutheran.org

Periodicals postage paid at Eau Claire, WI and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes (Form 3579) to Lutheran Spokesman, 501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI 54701-7134

Editor: Paul Naumann, 3732 Claymore Lane, Eau Claire, WI, 54701, E-mail to paul.naumann@ilc.edu; Assistant Editor: Craig Owings; Art Director, art direction & graphic design by Pipestone Publishing Co.; Proofreaders: David Lau and Paula Naumann; Staff: James Albrecht, David Bernthal, Timothy Daub, Wayne Eichstadt, David Fuerstenau, Mark Gullerud, Richard Kanzenbach, John Klatt, Joseph Lau, Delwyn Maas, Bruce Naumann, John Pfeiffer, Nathan Pfeiffer, David Reim, Peter Reim, Sam Rodebaugh, Michael Roehl, Robert Sauers, David Schierenbeck, Chad Seybt, Steven Sippert, Mark Weis.

Material submitted for publication should be sent to Editor Paul Naumann three months before date of publication. Announcements and other short notices should also be sent to Editor Naumann.

Business Manager: Rev. James Sandeen, 501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI, 54701. E-mail to jim.sandeen@ilc.edu. Individual subscriptions {foreign-U.S. currency only}: \$18.00 {\$36.00} for one year; \$34.00 {\$50.00} for two years; \$50.00 {\$72.00} for three years; sent in bulk to congregations: \$15.00.

Send address or payment question requests to: lutheranspokesman@ilc.edu
Spokesman Online Version at: www.lutheranspokesman.org
Printed in U.S.A.

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The Divine Plan for Families

It will likely come as no great surprise (for any Christian paying attention) that God’s plan for families is being threatened on virtually every front. In its most basic form, God’s plan does not require children. Children enhance and expand families; their arrival does not create them. God’s family plan began in the perfection of Eden when He created Eve from Adam’s rib and then gave her to Adam as his wife. In doing so, God not only established and defined marriage (one man and one woman joined together as “one flesh” for life), but also created the first family. The arrival of Cain, Abel, Seth, and all their siblings just expanded that first, original family. Like everything else God created, that first family He labeled “very good.”

Satan won a not-insignificant victory when he persuaded even Christian couples to begin speaking of “starting a family” by having children. Families begin with husband and wife. Sometimes they end there; other times God expands them. A husband and wife who are not blessed with children are no less a family than those that are.

Why is this important? Because families, by God’s design, start with the union of a man and a woman, joined in and under Christ, and bound by a lifelong, one-flesh commitment. We know that this is God’s plan because He has told us that He hates both divorce and sexual activity outside of marriage. Children were intended by God to be raised by a loving, committed father and mother. The wisdom of God’s plan is self-evident, both theologically and empirically. As the One Who designed both men and women, God knows that He uniquely equipped both to fulfill their own special roles in the family. God in His Word established that truth by clearly defining the roles of husbands and wives. God’s wisdom is also observable in that throughout the course of human history, the husband-and-wife nuclear family unit has provided basic stability to every civilization, without exception, especially when children are added. Children need both a father and a mother—because of the special gifts and abilities that God has given to each.

The wisdom of God’s plan is also validated by simply observing

the alternatives. 23% of all children in the US are being raised in single-parent homes, a number dramatically higher than any other country, according to a 2019 Pew Research study. Other studies have found the percentage in the US to be even higher. Multiple studies have shown that children of single-parent families are more likely to commit crimes, use drugs, grow up in poverty, and drop out of school. God’s design was both wise *and* loving. Same-sex couples represent a dramatic departure from

God’s plan for families. Perhaps not surprisingly, activists have so intimidated research firms that not a single meaningful study has been conducted to date to gauge the effects of same-sex households on child development and behavior.

Many Christians are forced into single-parent child rearing through no fault of their own. Many also raise wonderful, well-adjusted children despite the extraordinarily difficult circumstances they often face. These are exceptional cases that demonstrate God’s grace. They in no way disprove God’s rule or alter

His plan. God has clearly marked

the boundaries of the loving path that He fully intends for us to walk. Although God in His mercy has brought many unbelieving spouses to faith through the witness of a Christian spouse, a far greater number tell of great heartache and frustration. Our loving God sought to spare believers from such misery by establishing a family plan that begins with the selection of a spouse who shares one’s Christian faith. It continues with daily immersion in the Word of God, mutual support and counsel, and Christian education—especially for tender, developing lambs. This is God’s will, His loving plan for His children. Those planning families would be wise to ask themselves why they would seek any other path.



Michael Roehl is pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Bismarck, North Dakota.

The Value of a Christian Mom

There have been a number of publications in recent years estimating the monetary value of a stay-at-home mom. They look at mom's various roles, her number of hours worked, the savings on outside childcare, and crunch it all together to spit out a number usually in the neighborhood of \$100,000. That's one way to estimate a mother's value, I suppose; but rather than looking to economists for guidance on the matter, we can recognize that God is a much more reliable resource.

Just how valuable is a mother? Throughout Scripture, God gives us a good sense of how much He values mothers. For instance, Jesus once expressed His great desire to gather the people of Jerusalem together in His arms *"as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings."*

(Matthew 23:37) God inspired King David to describe in terms of motherhood the great care with which He crafts each individual person: *"For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb."* (Psalm 139:13) He also speaks through Isaiah in motherhood language to impress upon us that He could never forget His people: *"Can a woman forget her nursing child, And not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, Yet I will not forget you."* (Isaiah 49:15) We cannot understand God in God's terms; the best we can do is to understand God in human terms. And so, God frequently employs the beautiful ideal of motherhood to impress upon us the self-sacrificial love He has for us.

And what a beautiful illustration motherhood is! Mom often does so much thankless work behind the scenes, often concerns herself with the protection and nurturing of her children, and often thinks less of her own desires and needs than those of her family. And in this way, that motherhood ideal can serve as a peek behind the curtain of God's selfless

love for His children. Of course, reality doesn't often line up with that ideal, and many a mother is burdened with the guilt of her failures as a mom. How many of us entered parenthood with the plans of being a perfect parent? How quickly those illusions crumbled apart, leaving us with the frequent prayer,

"God, please help me become a better parent!"

And yet, this acknowledgement can help us to understand the true value of a mother. In many areas of life, value is determined on the basis of what someone is willing to pay. And for you, mom, God set the price by exchanging His Son's life for yours. He redeemed you from all of your sins, including even those failures which burden your heart. Even though you may sometimes be a disappointment in your own eyes, in God's eyes you are as a precious jewel. And this is a love that God will never grow out of,

which will never fade away, so that even if some of us have been separated by death from our moms this Mother's Day, in Christ, death does not separate them from God.

And if, for some reason, this Mother's Day is not an occasion for you to celebrate—perhaps due to some rift in your family relationships, or perhaps if you were never able to become a mother—remember that you have something even better than any Mother's Day card. You have God Himself present with you, God Who has a heart full of love, ears always open, and a mind always filled with thoughts of you. We know this to be true, since God Himself said, *"Surely they may forget, Yet I will not forget you."* (Isaiah 49:15)



Samuel Rodebaugh is pastor of Faith Lutheran Church of Manchester, Missouri.

OUR LITURGICAL LEGACY

Ever wonder why we Lutherans use the form of worship we do?

In this series we examine the depth and meaning of the various elements of our Lutheran worship service.

The Hallelujah

Martin Luther once wrote, “The Alleluia is the perpetual voice of the church, just as the memorial of His passion and victory is perpetual.” The word *hallelujah* appears frequently in our hymns, prayers, and liturgies. It is Hebrew for *praise the Lord*. One finds it throughout the psalms, but especially in Psalms 113-118, which are known as the “Great Hallelujah” psalms.

In many liturgies, the *hallelujah* forms the last part of the Gradual so the congregation sings it between the reading of the Epistle and the Gospel. It serves as a response to the Epistle and a prelude to the Gospel lesson. In *The Lutheran Hymnal* there are examples of it on pages ten and twenty. In the *Lutheran Service Book* it is on pages 156, 173, and elsewhere.

Early Christians used the word *hallelujah* to express their faith and joy while going about their daily work, so it was natural for them to include it in their regular worship. It is an appropriate response for those who have just heard the Word of God read to them. Isn't it true that the hearing of the grace and mercy of our Lord moves each of us to say “Hallelujah”?

Our hearts shout *hallelujah* at every mention of God's great works, especially His great forgiveness for our sins. As one of the “Hallelujah Psalms” says, “*He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the trash heap.*” (113:7 CSB) We were once dead in our trespasses and sins, without hope and without a future in heaven, without any ability to believe in God or come to Him, deserving only of His punishment now and in eternity. Yet He sent his own Son to the cross in our place so that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. He lifted us from the trash heap and has seated us among his believing children, noble heirs of heaven!

He helps simply because He is loving and merciful. This is different from the false gods of the world who expect something from their worshipers first before they will reach out to help.

We have a God Who reaches down to help people who need it. We do not have a God Who waits until we “help ourselves” or until we can show enough goodness to warrant His attention. We do not have a God Who decides to help us or not based on how much we love Him, but He helps simply because He is loving and merciful. This is different from the false gods of the world who expect something from their worshipers first before they will reach out to help.

*My sin, not in part, but the whole,
is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more;
praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

It is hard to imagine that we could ever “Hallelujah” too much when we hear Psalm 113 saying this: “*Let the name of the Lord be blessed both now and forever. From the rising of the sun to its setting, let the name of the Lord be praised!*” (2-3 CSB)

Dear Christian friends, don't ever stop your *hallelujahs*. Don't ever stop telling, showing, and discussing how great your God is and the great things He has done. When Jesus celebrated that last Passover meal with His disciples on Maundy Thursday, they sang a hymn before they went out into the night. The “hymn” was Psalms 113-118. Indeed, on the very night our Savior was betrayed, He was singing “*hallelujah*.” May we join Him in praising God forever!



David Schaller is a professor at Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Freedom to Submit

“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.”
(1 Peter 2:13-17).

The words “freedom” and “submission” would be considered by most people to be opposites. Yet, Peter tells us in our text to use our liberty as “bondservants of God,” submitting “to every ordinance of man.” What Peter states in our text is what Luther says in the Small Catechism in his explanation of the fourth commandment concerning those in authority, that “we should honor, serve, and obey them, and give them love and respect.” This goes against our nature. The old Adam within each of us is an anarchist who wants to rule himself. By nature, we hate order, government, submission, duty, and any other words associated with authority.



But think about what our world would be like without order. It would be chaotic and unpredictable. There would be no organized system for enforcing laws, resolving conflicts, or protecting people’s rights and freedoms. Peter reminds us that those in authority are a gift from God. They keep temporal order, provide protection, and judge disputes. They punish evil and reward good. By rejecting them, we are rejecting a blessing that God intends for us.

Though we are free in Christ—in fact, *because* we are free in Christ—we submit to those in authority, recognizing them as God’s blessings to us. We do so remembering that Christian freedom isn’t freedom to do what we want. The great freedoms of the Christian life are freedom from the ruling power of sin in our lives, freedom from guilt because we are forgiven of our sins, and freedom from trying to earn our salvation through our obedience to God’s Law. It is the freedom to live as God wants us to live, to give Him glory, and to thank Him for all He has done for us.

As God, Jesus is truly free. Yet, consider how He used His

freedom. He was subject to the government of His day. He perfectly obeyed His parents and every temporal authority that was placed over Him in His state of humiliation (the time between His incarnation and His resurrection). For us, He became a citizen of this world, under a less-than-perfect government. He stood before Pontius Pilate falsely charged with treason. He reminded Pilate that his authority to judge came

from God. Christ’s suffering was undeserved. He was innocent of any crime. Yet He was subject to the authorities on our behalf, to atone for all the times when we have rebelled. He honored, to atone for those times when we have disrespected.

Jesus used His freedom to suffer in order to deal with our stubborn refusal to honor and submit to the authority that God has put in place. Jesus bore the tremendous burden of our sins to the cross. On that cross, Jesus willingly offered Himself as an atonement of our sins. He assumed the punishment that should have been inflicted on His people. That’s what makes us truly free.

In that freedom, we submit ourselves to those in authority; not bowing to men, but kneeling before our Savior God. We recognize His protecting love and thank Him for His unfailing mercy. And as we live this way, we silence the world’s accusations, and perhaps even cause someone to ask us about our faith, giving us an opportunity to share the Gospel.



Robert Sauers is pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Winter Haven, Florida, and a member of the CLC Board of Missions

Another Perfect Day

“Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.”
(Genesis 1:31)

Imagine yourself hiking in the Rocky Mountains under a sky astonishingly blue—the temperature is ideal as the breeze flutters aspen leaves that have begun to turn bright yellow, or on the deck sipping from a hot cup of coffee as you watch an amazing sunrise over the mirror-like lake, or playing with your grandchildren who have been pretty well-behaved most of the day—freely blessing their grandparents with hugs and kisses.



What a sorry mess people have made in the quest to make the world a better place, yes, (in their imagination) a perfect place! To that end they have passed laws, coerced and enforced their concepts of “good” on people, and even gone to war. War follows (and often overlaps) war. When people wonder why we can’t all just get along, it demonstrates that they don’t understand what sin has done to the world in general and human hearts in particular.

In response to such experiences, you may feel inclined to say that it was a (nearly) perfect day.

We know, of course, that we’re living in a world marred by sin. History abounds with evidence of that. When we were still infants we became aware of pain, fear, and sadness. Such things have been a part of our existence, and they will continue to be during our time here.

And yet . . . there are those moments when we get a glimpse of the goodness that God embedded into His Creation. We can close our eyes and imagine how pleasant it was for our first parents to work in a garden unvexed by weeds. How wonderful it must have been for them to have no discord in their relationship with one another! How nice to lie down to sleep with no regrets, no guilt, no worries! How pleasant to interact playfully with lion and lamb alike!

That is not the reality of our day-to-day living. But, for a fleeting moment, we can enjoy going back to where the Bible begins and read about the place that was made by our loving, almighty God. We also “*desire a better, that is, a heavenly country.*” (Hebrews 11:16) Oh, how we long to experience a truly perfect day—something that eludes us even when we’re going through a relatively good week. Isn’t the overarching theme of the Bible about how God promised, and then proceeded, to set things right again? As we read through the Scriptures we see how far the Lord is willing to go to make that happen.

God knows. It is true that a war must be waged, but not as one corrupt human idea against another. The Lord Himself declared war against sin, death, and the devil. “*The LORD is a warrior; The LORD is His name!*” (Exodus 15:3 NASB)

God knew how to defeat those enemies. It was not with overwhelming force, otherwise we all would have been casualties of war. God sent His Son to save us by being “*wounded for our transgressions . . . bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.*” (Isaiah 53:5) The Lord found a way to destroy sin without also destroying us.

Now go to where the Bible ends: “*God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.*” (Revelation 21:4)

That is when we really will have a perfect day, and another, and then another . . .



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The Mustard Seed

“Then He said, ‘What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches.’” (Luke 13:18-19)

They are the largest and tallest trees on earth. One is a Coast Redwood that reaches 380’ straight into the air, the other is a Giant Redwood that boasts a trunk 36’ in diameter. Colossal in size, each began life as a tiny seed.

A mustard tree can’t rival the sequoias for size, but the contrast is similar. It goes into the ground as a kernel less than .005” across. It matures into a tree that can shelter the birds. Such is the pattern of God’s kingdom: small start, exponential growth.

How small? Eight believers small when the Flood began. Abraham and childless Sarah hardly resembled the great nation God promised they’d become. Elijah calculated that he, himself, was the last believer in the land. When God greenlighted the return from captivity, only a remnant went back to Jerusalem.

In the New Testament, you’ll find only one forerunner to the Messiah, just twelve fulltime disciples, one Samaritan woman to bring her village to Jesus, one Ethiopian eunuch to take Christ to his people, two men, Paul and Barnabas—and later Paul and Silas, to carry the seed throughout the Gentile world.

At any time, the kingdom can be the size of a seed, a tree, or anything in between. While the small-stage seems most worrisome to us, the parable shows that the kingdom is not about numbers or size. It’s about God drawing sinners to Himself through the “weakness” and “foolishness” of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 1:25).

With attendance numbers in sharp decline, this is a reminder the modern church needs. The temptation is to help the Gospel along by making it more impactful, emotional, exciting, appealing, and so forth. Is this what the Lord wants from His

people? No. The kingdom may appear to be gasping for air and ready to die, but it only seems that way to us. For Elijah’s one, the Lord had seven thousand who had not bowed to Baal. From Abraham and Sarah’s one son, the Lord continues to

assemble a spiritual family that outnumbers the countable stars. No matter how small, insignificant, or unlikely it seems, cast the seed and know that God will bless it.

The reason? Because the Mustard Seed is also the Seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15. The eternal God came here in the most unpredictable of ways. Born as a helpless baby, cradled in a feeding trough, announced to lowly shepherds, Jesus was spurned and rejected by the very people He came to save.

The men He personally trained were the very ones who betrayed, denied, and/or deserted Him. Jesus was completely alone on the cross when He was also abandoned by His heavenly Father. His body, like a helpless-looking seed, was buried; only to rise on schedule, as predicted, with all power and glory. His resurrection proclaims, “Mission accomplished. Payment accepted. All sins forgiven.” Jesus is the Mustard Tree. We are the birds who find shelter in His branches.

Our world is getting darker and our congregations smaller. It’s terribly sad, but not surprising. Unless we’ve abandoned the Gospel, no one should start hanging crepe above the church doors. Overcoming darkness and unbelief are God’s specialty. Scatter the seed with confidence. It looks small and inconsequential, but one day we’ll see how sequoia-like His kingdom really is.



James Albrecht is pastor of St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in Okabena, Minnesota.

This series offers an overview of the chief teachings of the Christian church.

The Holy Christian Church

People who are orphans, when they are adopted into a loving and secure home, will sometimes say that they have found their “forever family.” Such adoption is the case when we read in Psalm 68:6: “*God sets the solitary in families.*” As we continue learning about the work of the Holy Spirit, we find that He is credited with doing just that for those whom He has “called . . . by the gospel, enlightened . . . with His gifts, sanctified and kept . . . in the true faith” (*Luther’s Catechism*, Sydow edition). Luther continues, “In the same way, He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth.” The Holy Spirit is in the business of making a “forever family” for Jesus Christ. He does it daily, with millions of people, all with an eternal home in mind.

The English Bible’s primary name for this “family” is *Church*; the New Testament Greek word for it is *ekklesia* (from which we get words like “ecclesiastical”); it means “called out,” and that fits, because the Church is made up of those whom the Holy Spirit has called out of a perishing and corrupt world. By God’s grace these have escaped sin’s condemnation and despair. The apostle Peter says God has called the Church “*out of darkness into His marvelous light.*” (1 Peter 2:9)

Saved by grace through faith in Christ, the righteousness of faith is our adoption decree, the declaration of our legal status as members of God’s family. God alone is responsible for building this Church. In the days after Pentecost, after the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the believers and they preached the risen Christ boldly and vigorously in Jerusalem, we read that “*the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*” (Acts 2:47) Believers in Christ sprang up wherever the Word was scattered—not like individual blades of grass; rather, like the aspen clump—one plant which springs up with new shoots all over the forest floor, yet remains, beneath the soil, a single living organism.

Because it springs up out of the soil of Gospel preaching and faith, the Bible (shifting the metaphor a bit) says the Church is a building, made out of living stones (believers, like you and me): “*Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*” (1 Peter 2:4-5).

The Holy Spirit is in the business of making a “forever family” for Jesus Christ.

There are some imperfect uses of the English word *church*. When we speak of the *ekklesia*—people gathered by faith in Christ into this invisible, spiritual body—most Christian writers will write “Church” with a capital C. But sometimes we say, “going to church,” meaning to gather for worship, or that we’re going to paint “the church,” referring to that building set aside for congregational uses. These meanings are not “the

Church” in the proper sense. Because it’s present wherever the Word and Sacraments are in use, the Church is “*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone*” (Ephesians 2:20).

We are indeed a family, or as the Apostles’ Creed says, a “communion of saints.” The Holy Spirit, Whose inspired Word contains many metaphors, speaks of the Church as a body functioning seamlessly as a communion of mutually dependent parts. 1 Corinthians 12:12 explains “*for as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.*” This Body is our “forever family”—not always so impressive on the outside, but in God’s view, it is holy, Christian, a communion (fellowship), and filled with saints as far as the eye can see.



Peter Reim is a former pastor who now teaches English at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. He makes his home in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Trinity Lutheran Church Millston, Wisconsin

It has been over five years since the "Slice of Life" article about Trinity Lutheran Church appeared in the Lutheran Spokesman in January 2018. At that time, the article about the history of the congregation was written by then-Pastor Richard Kanzenbach. Trinity's new pastor, Pastor Chad Seybt, is now writing this article. At the writing of the 2018 article, it was reported that Trinity consisted of 28 members. The membership now numbers 13, with an average attendance of 7. Despite the decrease in membership over the past five years, there is reason to be hopeful in our Savior God Who promises "where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20)

No longer is Trinity served by various retired pastors, seminary students, and professors; but rather, by God's grace and help (and *only* by His help), Pastor Seybt is able to serve the congregation each Sunday. Having the same face in the pulpit from Sunday to Sunday has allowed for some stability and has given the pastor opportunity to speak with visitors after the service. With various opportunities for camping in the Millston area, there are visitors that pop in from time to time during the summer months: mostly CLC members but some non-members as well.

On July 3, 2022, the town of Millston celebrated its 150th anniversary. It was a big occasion, with hundreds of people flocking to the little town of a population less than 150. As a memorial of the celebration, a quilt was made on



which Trinity Lutheran Church has its own square—a beautiful picture of the outside of the church building. A few members of Trinity congregation helped to plan and also participated in the activities of that day. One member presented a historical demonstration of moss baling, for



which the area is known. Pastor and congregation members alike were able to meet and mingle with many attendees of the special town celebration.

There have also been some email inquiries in the past year, and while they have not yet led to an increase in congregational membership, we are confident that the Word of God shared with those inquiring will not return to Him void but will accomplish what He pleases (Isaiah 55:11).

Of course, the highlight of every year at Trinity is the annual ILC Tour Choir service, in which young people from Immanuel Lutheran High School, College, and Seminary present God's Word in song during the regular Sunday service. This service always brings visitors, both member and nonmember alike. The congregation is also looking forward with joyful anticipation to the confirmation of one of its young people later on this year.

"Man looks at the outward appearance." (1 Samuel 16:7) No

doubt, sinful man sees Trinity and focuses on the dwindling numbers, the very few sitting in the large sanctuary on Sunday morning, and the fact that the congregation doesn't even have an organist but must use a computer tablet with Bluetooth speaker every Sunday. Looking at Trinity's situation this way might seem discouraging.

Thankfully, *"The Lord does not see as man sees."* (1 Samuel 16:7) Every Sunday in Millston there are a faithful few who gather to be comforted by and instructed in the pure teaching of God's Law and Gospel. You are welcome to join us at 11:00 A.M. on Sunday mornings to have your heart filled with the Word of Him Who died and rose again that we unworthy sinners might be saved.



Chad Seybt is pastor of Morning Star Lutheran Church in Fairchild, Trinity Lutheran Church in Millston, St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Melrose, and Peace with God Evangelical Lutheran Church in Onalaska; all in Wisconsin.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

In this series, those involved with CLC foreign missions profile one aspect of our overseas endeavors.

West African CLC Pastoral Conference

The West African CLC Pastoral Conference (WACLPC) was held in Lomé, Togo on February 28 through March 2, 2023. Eight pastors and leaders came from Nigeria (NCLC), two pastors from Liberia (LCLC), six pastors and leaders from Togo and Ghana (EELCT), along with Missionaries Todd Ohlmann (USA) and Peter Evensen (Togo).

The theme of the conference was Matthew 6:33: *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”* In addition to morning and evening devotions and a communion worship service on Wednesday evening, the following six papers were presented:

- What God Reveals about His Kingdom
- What God Reveals about His Righteousness
- An Exegesis/Sermon Study of Matthew 6:19-34
- What God Really Promises in Matthew 6:19-34 (A Law and Gospel Study)
- The Blessings of Keeping God’s Kingdom and His Righteousness as Our First Priority
- Seeking God’s Kingdom vs. Seeking My Kingdom in the Pastoral Ministry.

This conference was a great blessing to all who attended. The leaders and pastors of our affiliated church bodies in West Africa had the opportunity to make or renew acquaintances with one another and to encourage one another with God’s word.

The focus on seeking first God’s kingdom and His righteousness is particularly important in Africa because so many other churches and pastors preach the false “prosperity gospel” that promises material blessings to those who are faithful (especially those who contribute to those churches). Africa is filled with billboards and church signs featuring the picture of the pastor (and often his wife). Many focus on establishing their ministry; that is, their own kingdom rather than God’s.



West African CLC Pastoral Conference attendees.

Jesus’ words are an important reminder that the churches and missions we serve belong to God. He has called us to shepherd His flock and faithfully proclaim His Word, His kingdom, and His righteousness—the righteousness of God that He gives to us through faith in Jesus Christ. Pray that all the pastors and leaders

will take these things to heart as they return to the work in their respective countries, and that they will be able to share what they have learned with other pastors in order to encourage them also.

The next conference is scheduled for February 4-6, 2025, to be held in Nigeria. The tentative theme comes from 2 Timothy 4:2: *“Preach the Word!”*



Above: member Deborah helps serve at a pastoral conference meal.

Right: “fufu,” a common item in the West African diet.



Peter Evensen is a full-time foreign missionary for the CLC.

IN THE PIPELINE

Want to meet the person who may be your next pastor or Christian day school teacher? This series profiles the men and women who are in their final year of preparation for the public teaching or preaching ministry at our Immanuel Lutheran College and Seminary in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Jonah Albrecht



Age: 25

Program: Seminary

Year in School: Senior

Where were you born?

I was born in St. Joseph, Michigan.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Okabena, Minnesota, and lived there for over twenty years.

Married? Unmarried? Tell us about your family.

I'm single. I have five older brothers, four nieces, and two nephews.

What hobbies, sports or extracurriculars interest you?

I like anything outdoors, especially hunting, fishing,

baseball, and football.

Tell us one thing about yourself that most people don't know.

I am an avid cook and baker. My grandma wanted me to go to culinary school when I was younger.

Which academic subjects especially interest you?

History, Psychology, and Sociology.

How did you first come to consider the public teaching or preaching ministry as a career?

It has always been in my mind since I was little. Seeing the ins and outs of a pastor's work while growing up had a big influence on me. But it was really in college where the Holy Spirit made it clear that the public ministry was a worthwhile calling for me.

What have you appreciated most about your time at ILC?

I've always appreciated the activities one can be involved in at ILC. Even more so, I've loved being able to give back by teaching things I enjoyed like theatre, basketball, and baseball. Over the years it's been amazing to witness kids passing through ILC and becoming Christian adults.

What qualities do you think will most be needed by the future leaders of the church?

Shrewdness and patience. The society we live in today is one supposedly marked by love, but it is a love promoted by the world. It is important for leaders of the church to remember and hold fast to the foundation set by our Lord through the Apostles and Prophets against the false love of the world, no matter how appealing such love may be to the flesh. But it is also important for a leader to patiently instruct his flock in the truth God has given us.

“BREAD OF LIFE” READINGS MAY 2023

TLH = The Lutheran Hymnal, 1941; WS = Worship Supplement 2000; LSB = Lutheran Service Book, 2006

Date	Hymns	Reading	Comments
May 1	TLH 628 /LSB 864	Ezekiel 34:1-16	The Lord calls Ezekiel to prophesy against the unfaithful shepherds of Israel. The Lord Himself will seek out and restore His scattered sheep.
May 2	TLH 431 /LSB 709	Ezekiel 34:17-31	The Lord will judge His sheep and will send the Messiah to be their shepherd. The Lord promises to establish a covenant of peace with His people.
May 3	TLH 2	Jeremiah 23:1-32	The Lord confronts unfaithful shepherds, the false prophets who have led His people astray. In yet another promise to send the Messiah, the Lord names Him <i>“the LORD our righteousness,”</i> (23:6 ESV) a fitting name for our Savior Who is the Lord and Who has accomplished our righteousness with His holy life.
May 4	TLH 261 /LSB 655	Jeremiah 26	The unfaithful priests and prophets plot to kill Jeremiah for his faithful proclamation of the word of the Lord. Jeremiah realizes that the threat to his life is real; other faithful prophets had been murdered in Judah. Nonetheless, Jeremiah continues preaching, boldly calling the people of Judah to repentance. The Lord moves the people to believe the preaching of Jeremiah and spares his life.
May 5	TLH 467 /LSB 645	1 Peter 2	Through His Word the Lord builds His faithful people into a spiritual temple to His glory. Peter calls the faithful to grow in the Word, demonstrating their faith through their actions. In particular, believers are to submit to those in positions of authority.
May 6	TLH 355 /LSB 526	John 14:1-14	Before His betrayal and arrest on Maundy Thursday, Jesus instructs His disciples, to prepare them not only for His death on the cross, but also for His ascension into heaven. God the Father has revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ, His Son.
May 8	TLH 54 /LSB 918	Exodus 13	At the Passover, the Lord spared the firstborn of the Israelites. Now the Lord commands that every firstborn, man or animal, be consecrated to Him as a reminder of His gracious deliverance. The Lord leads His people out of Egypt in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.
May 9	TLH 446 /LSB 663	John 8:31-47	By nature we were enslaved to sin, but Jesus, the Truth, has set us free. Jesus pronounces harsh words against His enemies, who have not believed His preaching and who are plotting to kill Him.
May 10	TLH 40 /LSB 798	John 8:48-59	Jesus’ enemies accuse Him of being possessed by a demon. Jesus continues proclaiming the truth. From the burning bush, God revealed His holy name to Moses, <i>“I AM WHO I AM.”</i> (Exodus 3:14) Now Jesus claims to be God when He says, <i>“before Abraham was, I am.”</i> (8:58) The enemies attempt to stone Jesus, but His hour has not yet come.
May 11	TLH 43	Acts 17:16-34	Vexed by the rampant open idolatry in Athens, Paul encounters Greeks who crave new ideas. Paul uses the altar <i>“To the unknown god,”</i> (17:23) as a segue into a sermon on the true God.
May 12	TLH 621 /LSB 858	1 Peter 3	Peter continues exhorting the faithful to live godly lives. Wives are to submit to their husbands. Husbands are to love and to honor their wives. All believers are to live together in unity, in love, and in peace. All believers are to be prepared to defend the faith and to suffer for the sake of righteousness. The flood was a type (that is, a prefiguring) of baptism, which saves us.
May 13	TLH 233 /LSB 498	John 14:15-31	Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to His disciples. Jesus gives to His disciples true and lasting peace. Faithfulness to the Lord consists in keeping His Word.
May 15	LSB 894	Genesis 9:1-17	The world is a different place after the flood. Now the Lord permits man to eat meat in addition to green plants. As He commanded Adam and Eve, so God now commands Noah and his sons to reproduce and to populate the earth. The Lord promises never to flood the whole earth again, and He gives the rainbow as a sign of this covenant.
May 16	TLH 649 /LSB 715	Psalms 93	Few events in the natural world are more terrifying than a storm at sea, but our God is more powerful than even the fiercest of hurricanes. Jesus Christ, Who is the Lord, commands the storms, and they must obey.
May 17	TLH 216 /LSB 492	John 16:16-33	It is to our benefit that Jesus has removed His visible presence from the earth. He has gone to take His rightful position of honor and glory at the right hand of the Father, ruling all things for the wellbeing of His faithful people. Furthermore, He will return once more to take us home.
May 18	TLH 212 /LSB 493	Acts 1	Jesus ascends into heaven. We will see Him return in the same way when He comes again to judge the living and the dead. The disciples of Jesus choose Matthias to serve as an apostle in place of Judas Iscariot.
May 19	TLH 367 /LSB 531	Ephesians 1:15-23	Paul thanks the Lord for the saints of Ephesus and prays for them. Our ascended Lord rules over all things. Since we are His body and He is our head, we are secure under His gracious care and protection.
May 20	TLH 218 /LSB 494	Luke 24:36-53	Having walked with two disciples to Emmaus, Jesus appears to the disciples gathered in Jerusalem on Easter evening. Luke concludes his Gospel with a brief account of Jesus’ ascension.
May 22	TLH 550 /LSB 874	John 8:12-30	Jesus teaches in the temple, proclaiming Himself to be <i>“the light of the world.”</i> (8:12) Jesus predicts His death, to the confusion of the religious leaders. Many of the people believe in Him.
May 23	TLH 335	1 Peter 4:5 - 6:11	Christians are not to live as unbelievers. Our desire is to live as though Christ could return in judgment at any moment and to use our gifts to the benefit of one another and to the glory of God. Expecting to suffer trials and insults as a result of our faith, we entrust ourselves to the Lord.
May 24	TLH 286	John 17	In his “high priestly prayer,” Jesus prays that the Father glorify Him. Jesus prays for His immediate disciples. Jesus prays for all who will become His disciples.
May 25	TLH 527 /LSB 757	Numbers 11:16-35	The Lord appoints seventy elders to assist Moses in leading the children of Israel. In His mercy the Lord provides His people with quail for meat. In His wrath the Lord punishes His people for their complaining and for their greed.
May 26	TLH 224 /LSB 497	Acts 2:1-41	The Lord fulfills His promise to pour out the Holy Spirit on His Church. Tongues of fire rest on the disciples of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit enables them to speak in tongues so that the Jews who have gathered from various nations may hear and understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter preaches a sermon and three thousand new converts are baptized.
May 27	TLH 235 /LSB 913	John 7:1-39	Jesus travels to Jerusalem secretly for the Feast of Booths. During the feast Jesus begins teaching publicly in the Temple to the amazement of many of the Jews. The chief priests and the Pharisees attempt to have Jesus arrested.
May 29	TLH 30 /LSB 811	Joel 2:18-32	Through the prophet Joel the Lord calls His people to repentance. Among other prophecies, the Lord promises to pour out His Spirit.
May 30	TLH 452 /LSB 661	Ezekiel 39	All who oppose the people of the Lord will suffer a humiliating defeat when they face the Lord in the fury of His wrath. It is not a pretty picture that Ezekiel paints for us, but it is a stark reminder of the perfect justice of our righteous God. At the same time, Ezekiel paints for us a beautiful and comforting picture of the abounding grace of our Lord as He restores His chosen people.
May 31	TLH 17 /LSB 804	Psalms 104	We join the psalmist in praising the Lord for the wisdom and the love that He has displayed in the six days of the creation of the universe.

ILC NEWSLETTER

Every other month we get an update on what's been happening recently at our Immanuel Lutheran High School, College and Seminary in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Immanuel Lutheran High School Visitors' Day 2023

The students and staff of Immanuel Lutheran High School in Eau Claire, Wisconsin are excited to welcome visitors to campus for the annual High School Visitors Day weekend!

What is Visitors Day?

Every spring, prospective students from around the country travel to the Immanuel campus so they can meet current students and staff, tour the facilities, learn about academics and activities, and experience the Christ-centered atmosphere that Immanuel provides.

Who is invited?

All students currently in grades 7-11, along with their parents, pastors, and teachers, are invited to attend. The majority of the students are in grades 7-8. Most of the students who attend are from Wisconsin and Minnesota, but sometimes visitors from as far away as California, Florida, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Washington also make the trip.

When is Visitors Day?

Events start Thursday evening, April 27th and continue through Saturday evening, April 29th. Visitors are welcome to arrive Thursday night for evening chapel, followed by outdoor and indoor games. Visitors who travel from a distance are welcome to stay in the dorms on Thursday and/or Friday night so they can experience what it would be like to live in the dorm. The majority of activities happen on Friday, April 28.

What kinds of activities take place on Visitors Day?

Friday kicks off in the morning with interactive mixer activities so the visitors can get to know each other as well as current ILC high school students. Next, as they tour the campus in small groups, they're introduced to a variety of clubs and extracurricular activities. Morning events also include chapel, staff introductions, and a classroom experience. Adult visitors are welcome to meet with the financial manager and principal for an orientation as well. After lunch in the cafeteria, visitors learn more about athletics and life on campus, followed by some Q & A time with current students.

What special events can visitors watch?

Chapel devotions, a track meet, varsity baseball and softball games, a hands-on robotics demonstration, a band concert, student musical performances, and a theater performance of "The Westing Game" will



all be available.

Where can I learn more and register?

Visit ilc.edu to view a full schedule of events, read the invitation letter, and register both students and chaperones.

What if I can't attend Visitors Day this year?

You're welcome to take a virtual tour at ilc.edu

("Visit the Campus" link) or connect with Principal Joel Gullerud at joel.gullerud@ilc.edu to set up a personal tour of campus.

Why consider attending Immanuel?

Perhaps current and former students can best answer this question:

- "My time at Immanuel gave me the skill set, friends, and strong faith that I needed to walk with Christ the rest of my life."
- "The dorm is an amazing place to call home for your high school years. Immanuel is a great place to be able to go through high school with people that share your faith."
- "Immanuel provides its students with a fellowship opportunity unlike any other and has allowed me to build strong Christian relationships to last a lifetime."
- "Immanuel's dedicated teachers prepared me for college-level coursework, and its small class sizes set me up to thrive in the discussion-heavy setting of many college classes. I will always be grateful for the teachers' willingness to provide an outstanding, customized education."

The Immanuel students and staff pray for safe travels for everyone traveling to campus for Visitors Day and look forward to an exciting weekend of Christian fellowship!



Joel Gullerud is a professor at Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

SEEN IN PASSING

Items of interest from various sources of religious news and opinion, in print and on the web.

The Secularization of America. In an article for *The Conversation*, sociologist Phil Zuckerman cited three numbers that show the accelerating secularization of American society. According to recent research, “the percentage of people who believe in God has dropped from 98% in the 1950s to 81% today; among Americans under 30, it is down to an unprecedented 68%. Congregational membership, too, is at an all-time low. In 2021 Gallup found that, for the first time ever, fewer than half of Americans – 47% – were members of a church, synagogue or mosque. Yet another crucial measure of institutional religion in the U.S., the percentage of people identifying as religious, is also at a low: About 1 in 5 adults now say they have no religious affiliation, up from 1 in 50 in 1960. In short, when it comes to three key realms of religious life – belief, behavior and belonging – all are lower than they have ever been in American history.” Zuckerman, Phil. “3 big numbers that tell the story of secularization in America.” *Ethics and Religion*. TheConversation.com, 23 Feb. 2023. Web. 17 Mar. 2023.

Christianity Gaining Ground In . . . Israel? “The Christian population of Israel has increased to around 182,000 people, according to a census report from the government statistics bureau. Christians make up 1.9 percent of citizens. Nearly 13,000 live in Jerusalem, but the largest Christian communities are in Nazareth (21,100) and Haifa (16,700). More than three-quarters of the Christians are Arab. The largest denomination is the Byzantine Rite Greek Catholic Church, but there are an estimated 20,000 Messianic Jews, 7,000 Anglicans, and 900 Baptists. Few, however, are converts. All but 1 percent of Christians in Israel were raised in Christian households.” Silliman, Daniel. “Israel: Christian community grows.” *News*. ChristianityToday.com, 13 Mar. 2023. Web. 17 Mar. 2023.

U.S. Administration Ignores Plight of Nigerian Christians. Christians make up nearly half of Nigeria’s population of 200 million. Sadly, Nigeria is the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian. The World Index of Christian Persecution states that Nigeria is where 89% of Christian killings throughout the world took place over the last several years. In 2022, 5,621 Christians worldwide were killed for their faith, with 90% of these killings occurring in Nigeria, according to a Jan. 17 report by Open Doors, a watchdog that tracks Christian persecution. Despite these numbers and the brazen bombings of churches, however, the Biden administration omitted Nigeria as a “country of particular concern” in its 2021 and 2022 International Religious Freedom

Reports, an annual blacklist of countries where faith-based persecution is widespread. In explaining the decision, Secretary of State Antony Blinken argued that the slaughter of Christians was not religious persecution, but “a result of a conflict over resources exacerbated by climate change.” Crabtree, Susan. “Biden Faces Pressure To Help Nigerian Christians.” *Religious Liberty Around the World*. RealClearPolitics.com, 13 Feb. 2023. Web. 17 Mar. 2023.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

2023 West Central Delegate Conference

May 23-25, 2023

Trinity Lutheran Church, Watertown, South Dakota

Agenda:

- Point II.D of the Joint Statement—“Scripturally Sound?”—Pastor Benjamin Libby
- How the False Doctrines of Major Denominations Are Evidenced in their Liturgies—Pastor Thomas Schuetze
- Evaluation of CRT [Critical Race Theory]—Delegate from Berea, Sioux Falls
- Is “Right Hand/Arm” of the Lord in the Old Testament a Reference to Jesus?—Pastor Timothy Daub
- The Place of the Book of Esther in the Canon of Scripture—Mr. David Maas
- A Comparison of Psalm 4:4 and Ephesians 4:26—Pastor Aaron Ude
- A Study of Sensuality and Its Relation to Idolatry—Mr. Michael Sprengeler
- The Grammar of the Lord’s Prayer as Explained in Luther’s Catechism and Hymn—Pastor Timothy Wheaton
- Christian Freedom: Does Scripture Stop Us, or Does Scripture Start Us?—Delegate from Redeemer, Cheyenne
- Faith-Based Healthcare Options—Delegate from Gift of God, Mapleton, North Dakota
- The Joy of Christian Giving (Financial Stewardship)—Delegate from Prince of Peace, Loveland.
- A Devotional Study of a General Epistle—Pastor Richard Kanzenbach
—Submitted by Pastor Timothy Daub, Secretary