**Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church LC-MS**

Monthly Newsletter --- August 2023

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“THE ROCK and THE SWORD”

“Built upon the Rock of Christ and wielding the

Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.”

**From the Pastor:**

**Thoughts on First Communion Prior to Confirmation**

Martin Luther said about the Sacrament of the Altar*, “This sacrament is the Gospel.”* Do any of us think less of it? I should hope not. In this miracle that God sets before us each week, we encounter Jesus Christ, as true God and true Man, who gives His flesh as true food and His blood as true drink. He is the heavenly food that comes down to earth to satisfy the hungry soul. In this Sacrament, He gives to us His body and blood, given and shed on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. And, as the Small Catechism teaches, “Where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.”

We reach the pinnacle of the Divine Service each week in the celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar. When the Host is lifted high above the chalice and you hear the Words the “the Peace of the Lord be with you always,” your eyes are drawn to the bread and the wine, the body and the blood, which according to Christ’s own words are for the forgiveness of your sins. Regularly, through preaching and catechesis, your pastors have shown the centrality of this meal in the life of the Church and in our own lives.

How can we be surprised, then, when our children begin to take notice of the Sacrament and want to be participants with us in communing? Their desire to receive the body and blood of Christ is the result of our faithfulness in teaching what is most important. It is not as if they are any less able to understand the gift Christ freely gives. It is a mystery that must be by all founded in faith. Reason is what lords itself over faith making many have doubts as to whether or not this could truly be the body and blood of Jesus as He said. Yet, children often believe because it is God’s Word and who could challenge such words?

I realize that many churches, including my own home church, practiced *not* communing children until following confirmation at or around 8th grade. So it was that I was taught what the Sacrament was, believed that it was the body and blood of Jesus, but then told I was not allowed to receive it until I was older. This was altogether confusing. Should I want it or not? Is it supposed to be the center of my Christian faith or not? If it is, what prevents me from receiving it as a child who believes, confesses, and desires to grow in the faith confessed in this church?

This confusion that has been created here is a result of a change in practice from the church of the Reformation. During Luther’s time, no such formal “confirmation” existed. The parents and sponsors of the children would be teaching them the doctrines of the faith at home. When they perceived the child was ready to begin receiving the Sacrament of the Altar, they went to the pastor and asked him to examine their child. This usually took place between the ages of 7 and 12.

Though Saints Peter and Paul Lutheran Church has not practiced giving communion to children prior to confirmation, this is NOT a foreign practice in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Our own Synod Agenda, which contains the various “rites” which pastors are expected to follow, contains the “Rite of First Communion Prior to Confirmation.” This rite is used for those children who have been properly examined by the Pastor and have been found knowledgeable concerning the faith. My expectation for the children at All Saints Lutheran Church, because they practice this already, is for every child to have learned by heart the Catechism (the Ten Commandments, Apostles’ Creed, Lord’s Prayer, and institution texts for Holy Baptism, The Office of the Keys, and the Sacrament of the Altar). They also must be brought through the Christians Questions and Answers prepared by Martin Luther for those who intend to participate in the Sacrament.

If children presented for examination exhibit sufficient preparation and they have attended my class on the Lord’s Supper, then they are acknowledged as ready to receive the Sacrament using the Rite of First Communion Prior to Confirmation which as mentioned is found in the Lutheran Service Book Agenda (25). This does not mean that Catechesis and Confirmation are to be changed in any way. Children are required to grow in the Christian Faith according to the vows they take when brought through this rite. I expect children, as they age, to also grow in wisdom and understanding, as is expected of all of us. Therefore, children who begin communing as a child but then do not take part in Catechesis are not allowed to continue to commune because they are refusing to learn about the faith confessed by those communing next to them at the altar.

Many of you know that as a pastor I take very seriously the communing of anyone at this altar because I am responsible to give an account on the last day of my actions before Christ. This reality is always before me as I examine both children and adults in my attempt to not error in admitting anyone to the Lord’s Supper. So, I do not want any of you to consider this practice of communion prior to confirmation as a neglect of any pastor’s duty. In fact, I bring it before the eyes of this congregation as a fulfillment of my duties as a pastor in order to bring the best spiritual care possible for the young and the old.

Since I know that this practice may be new to many of you, I am including the Rite of First Communion Prior to Confirmation in this newsletter so that you may examine it.

In Christ,

Pastor Deal

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# **Rite of First Communion Prior to Confirmation**

The pastor addresses the congregation:

P Beloved in the Lord, in Holy Baptism these young people were born again as God’s children and received into His Church. As a further gift of His love for us, our Lord Jesus Christ has given His Church the Sacrament of the Altar and invites His children to receive this Sacrament in faith for the forgiveness of their sins. The apostle Paul reminds us, “Let a person examine himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup,” and “as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.” These candidates have received instruction and have been examined by the pastor regarding their sin and their understanding of the Sacrament of the Altar.

The pastor addresses the candidates:

P You are about to be admitted to the Lord’s Table. Holy Scripture describes the life of the Church and every baptized Christian with these words: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” You are invited by our Lord to come regularly to hear His Word and receive His Sacrament. You will continue to be instructed and nurtured in the Christian faith and life. You are invited to confess your sins and receive the comfort of Holy Absolution. All this will help you live as the child of God you have been made through Holy Baptism.

In testimony of this faith and confession, I now ask you:

P Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, and in the Holy Spirit?

R *Yes, I believe.*

P Do you believe that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is your Lord?

R *Yes, I believe.*

P Do you believe that you are a sinner?

R *Yes, I believe.*

P Do you believe that Jesus Christ died for you and shed His blood for you on the cross for the forgiveness of all your sins?

R *Yes, I believe.*

P Do you believe that in the Lord’s Supper He gives you His true body and blood for the forgiveness of all your sins and to strengthen your faith in Him and your love toward others?

R *Yes, I believe.*

P Do you intend to continue to hear and receive the instruction of your Lord, confess your sins, and receive the Lord’s Supper faithfully throughout your life?

R *Yes, with the help of God.*

P I therefore invite you to the Lord’s Supper to receive Christ’s precious body and blood for the forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C **Amen.**

The pastor addresses the congregation:

P Parents, (sponsors), and members of the congregation, the whole Church shares with you the responsibility and concern for the ongoing instruction and spiritual care of these young people. I now ask you, will you intercede for them in prayer and, as much as you are able, give them your counsel and aid that, in communion with the Church, they may grow up to lead a godly life to the praise and honor of Jesus Christ? Then answer: We will, with the help of God.

C **We will, with the help of God.**

Stand

P Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, whose Son Jesus Christ loved the young and called them to Himself, we ask You to bless these young people. Strengthen them in the faith through the Sacrament of Christ’s body and blood so that they may grow spiritually and bring forth the fruits of faith in a life of love toward others to the praise and honor of Your holy name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C **Amen.**

P We rejoice with thankful hearts in your confession of faith. As you continue to hear the Lord’s Word and receive His holy Supper, He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Peace T be with you.

C **Amen.**

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**REMINDER:** Please let the church office know of any changes to your address, phone, cell phone or your e-mail address!

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**Thank You for Serving in August:**

**Elder:** Jonathan Baisch; **Ushers:** Cheryl Fedele, Mike Flaugher, & Jesse Riffle; **Altarware:** prior~Diane Riefstahl & Marie Flaugher (08.13); after~ Hank Holcroft & Kati Laird.

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**Luther Hostel Scheduled for November 2023**

Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne, IN, is hosting its annual Luther Hostel for all interested in growing in their faith and understanding of God’s Word and our Worship.

The Luther Hostel is mainly for lay people, but there are often a few pastors in attendance as well.

This year’s theme is “The Christian Spiritual Life: Worship, Scripture, Prayer and the Fruits of Faith” Nov. 1-3.  Pastor and Evelyn Baisch would enjoy sharing more information about this event, will be attending again this year and welcome others to join them. Speak with them at church or phone: Pastor - #501/253-8292 or Evelyn - #501/253-8393. More info is available at <https://www.ctsfw.edu/ctsfw-events/event-luther-hostel-2023/>

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**VOTERS’ ASSEMBLY MEETING**

following worship

**August 20, 2023**

**CAPITAL CAMPAIGN AT A GLANCE**

Blue: Pledged as of 07.23.2023 $184,320 (92.16%)

Orange: Remaining

$15,680 (7.84%)

Total Contributions

as of 06.18.2023:

$175,745 (87.87%)

Previous: $173,869 (86.93%)

New: $1,876 (0.94%)

Remaining: $24,255 (12.13%)

*Amounts used are based on*

*weekly deposits reported.*

It’s not too late to submit a Capital Campaign pledge card! Pledge cards are available on the table outside Pastor’s office. If circumstances have changed and you need to update your pledge card, please see Jonathan Baisch. Updated pledges help our Trustees plan more effectively and efficiently.

**TRUSTEES’ UPDATE**

Among the issues/projects addressed by the Trustees in July were the following:

* **Stage and Fellowship Hall Exterior Doors:** Tim Cross Construction will be replacing the doors. The project should be completed in the next couple of weeks.
* **Weeds** have been sprayed in sidewalk cracks.
* **Greenie Green’s Landscape & Lawncare** has been contacted to finish up landscaping as the sealing of the exterior of the building has been completed.
* **Light** on Stambaugh Ave. front entrance has been replaced.

The **next Trustees’ meeting** is scheduled for Monday, August 14th at 7 pm.

As always, please feel free to speak with a Trustee with any concerns or place a note in Mike Flaugher’s library mailbox.

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**CELEBRATING IN AUGUST!**

**Birthdays:**

Anthony Bale 8 – 6

Brooke Psznick 8 – 6

Diane Riefstahl 8 – 6

Mildred Elavsky 8 – 8

Alex (Sasha) Carr 8 -28

Elizabeth Loughan 8 -30

**Anniversaries:**

Mike & Marie Flaugher 8 – 6

Jesse & Alyxis Riffle 8 – 7

Rev. Jacob & Ana Deal 8 –10

Rev. Arthur & Evelyn Baisch 8-17

David & Debbie Zurawsky 8-18

Rudy & Jean Tomko 8-20

\*If birthdays or anniversaries have been omitted, please let the church office know. Thank You!

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**Christian MD’s Win**

**California Lawsuit**

(Submitted by Pastor Emeritus Arthur Baisch.)

In February 2022, California enacted a law that would require doctors to participate in physician-assisted suicide even if it violated their religious convictions.

Representing the doctors and the Christian Medical and Dental Associations, Alliance Defending Freedom [ADF] sued the state.

To settle, California agreed to pay $300,000 for the doctors’ attorneys’ fees and not to enforce *“any criminal or civil punishment, including professional discipline or licensing sanction”* for any California-licensed physician who refused to participate in physician-assisted suicide.

ADF Senior Counsel Kevin Theriot said, *“Our clients seek to live out their faith in their medical practice, and that includes valuing every human life entrusted to their care. Participating in physician-assisted suicide very clearly would violate their consciences.”*

Theriot added, “*This is a significant victory for religious and conscientious physicians in California. The government cannot force any health care professional to act against his faith or medical ethics.”*

Source: adflegal.org 5/17/2023

*For more information about the Alliance Defending Freedom, which our church supports, and its works, feel free to speak with Pastor Baisch.*

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**LIKE & FOLLOW our Church’s Facebook page**

**(Saints Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church)!**

**ATTENTION AUDITORS!** A **Monthly Audit** will take place following worship, Sunday, August 27th in the library. If unable to attend, please phone Bev Chlpka at 724-962-4806.

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**Bible Study Classes**

The **Sunday Morning Bible Study** (8 am) group will continue examining the writings of the minor prophets when it reconvenes in September.

The **Women’s Bible Study** group will not meet in August, but will start up again in September. It will meet the first and third Thursdays of each month at 10 am and will begin studying the book of Romans.

The **Men’s Bible Study** will meet this month at Slippery Rock with Vicar Wessel. Details will be forthcoming.

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Submissions for the September issue of **“The Rock and the Sword”** newsletter are due to the secretary’s office Monday, August 21st at noon. This includes meeting dates and times for the church calendar.

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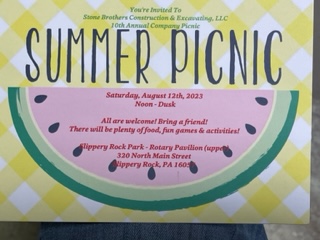
**Coffee Fellowship**

**is August 13th!**

Join us following worship, Sunday, August 13th for **Coffee Fellowship.** August’s sponsors are Mike & Marie Flaugher.

Sponsorships are still available for October and November of this year. Sponsors are asked to drop off 2-1/2—3 dozen “treats” and a quart of juice in the Fellowship Hall kitchen prior to church on their given Sunday. Coffee preparation, set-up, and clean-up will be done for you.

Please speak with Diane Riefstahl if you should have any questions.



**You’re invited!**

Adrian Stone, member of All Saints Lutheran Church in Slippery Rock and co-owner of Stone Brothers Construction (who did exterior work on our church building), has invited our congregation to their annual summer picnic.

Date: Saturday, August 12, 2023

Time: Noon to Dusk

Location: Slippery Rock Park – Rotary Pavilion (Upper); 320 North Main St., Slippery Rock, PA 16057

*All are welcome! Bring a friend! There will be plenty of food, fun, games, & activities!*

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**FOOD PANTRY UP-DATE**

Our Food Pantry roster continues to grow and the need for your support is on-going. If interested in knowing how you could assist with packing boxes or “pick-up” days, please contact Ana Deal.

The second Sunday of each month continues to be designated as “Stock the Food Pantry Sunday” and your financial contributions will be greatly appreciated! Donations may be placed in a pew envelope and placed in the offering plate. Please be sure to indicate your envelope number and designate the donation to the Food Pantry.

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Recently, our **Food Pantry** was blessed with a $1000.00 donation from the NLMK workers and their 50-50 raffle. This donation, through the Shenango Valley Charitable Foundation fund, will go a long way in assisting those families who depend on our Food Pantry to make ends meet.

***Please keep the following***

***in your prayers:***

PVT Alexander Carr RN 141

CO C 2nd BN 47th INFANTRY

197th INFANTRY BRIGADE

9375 CONWAY DRIVE 3425

FORT MOORE, GA 31905-4931

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Anna Mae Daris

1865 Hofius Lane

Hermitage, PA 16148

724-962-5079

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Millie Elavsky

1209 Maple Dr.

Hermitage, PA 16148

724-342-0345

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Rev. Edward & Irene Kucera

2442 Romar Dr.

Hermitage, PA 16148

724-342-6130

lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll Elizabeth Loughan

742 Salem Rd.

Hadley, PA 16130

724-253-2137

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Nancy Robertson

P.O. Box 1358

6 Stone Ridge Blvd.

Hermitage, PA 16148

724-977-0107

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Rudy & Jean Tomko

2629 Romar Dr.

Hermitage, PA 16148

724-979-4360

lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll lll

Betty Ann Wolf

7777 Arthur St., SC

Masury, OH 44438

330-448-1080

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Ed & Millie Zachar

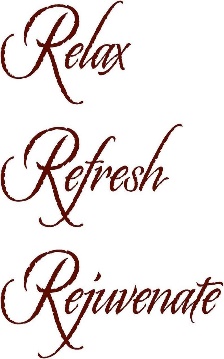
1320 Old Forge Rd.

Niles, OH 44446

330-652-9316

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Pastor Deal will be on vacation August 14th - 28th. Please contact Elder Jonathan Baisch (724-816-6866) or Pastor Emeritus Arthur Baisch (501-253-8292) if need arises during this time.

We are grateful to Pastor Baisch who will be conducting our Divine Services August 20th and 27th.

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**August Church Office Hours**

The secretary’s office will be open as follows in August:

* Tues., Aug. 1: 8:30 am – 1 pm.
* Thurs., Aug. 5: 8:30 am – 4:30 pm.
* Mondays, Aug. 7, 14, 21, & 28: 8:30 am – 4:30 pm.
* Remaining Thursdays in August: As needed.

If needing to enter the building, please phone first to make certain someone is there to let you in.

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**REMINDER:** If you do not have an email account or do not receive emails from the church, but wish to be notified of significant information concerning your fellow church members, please put a note in the secretary’s mail slot asking to receive a phone call. Every attempt will be made to phone you within 24 hours of an email being sent out.

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**Church Council Members**

are reminded that the October 23rd meeting has been re-scheduled for Monday, November 6th at 7 pm.

Remember thefollowing in prayer…

**~The Hurting and Healing:**  *Amy, Steve Antolovich, Ellen BaronCA, Lois BortnerCA, Dee Bullock, Bev & Joe Chlpka, Susan Davies, Tim Dudash, Judith & Eddy Furey, Griffin, Austin Hamilton, Pastor Charles Henrickson, Joan, Darla Krajci, Barbara Kreske, Pastor Ed Kucera, Jess Lavoie, Elizabeth Loughan, Paul LucasCA, Sandy Marshall, Gene Moore, Frank NiemeyerCA, Juanita Rentschler, Richard ReuningCA, Nancy RobertsonCA, Joel & Peggy Wasson, Angela WeserCA, and Ruth Wolf.*

**~The Homebound:**  *Anna Mae Daris, Millie Elavsky, Rudy & Jean Tomko, Betty Wolf, and Ed & Millie Zachar.*

**~Serving in the Military:**  *Alex (Sasha) Carr, Curtis Sinewe, and Joshua Solyan.*

**~Community & World Needs:**  *Those suffering from or affected by the coronavirus; those suffering due to the conflict between Ukraine and Russia; those suffering from loss and dislocation because weather disasters; those suffering from addiction and their families; Local, State, and National Government Leaders; safety for all Police Officers, Firefighters, & First Responders; the unemployed; our Third Quarter Local Mission: Luther Classical College.*

*\*CA represents cancer.*

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Our prayer list has been recently updated. If you would like someone’s name added or deleted from our **Prayer List**, please put a note in the secretary’s mail slot. Thank you!

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Our **Food Pantry** now has its own email address: [foodpantry@saintspeterandpaul.net](mailto:foodpantry@saintspeterandpaul.net).

Please share it with anyone who has need!

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***Reflections****~by Diane Riefstahl*

**The Shortening of Our Days**

At this point of the summer, I really start to take notice of the dwindling amount of daylight each day. Each passing day ticks off a minute or two of ever-precious light as the sun rises later and sets sooner. In the winter months, I long for the chirping of birds in the early morning and the late-evening sunsets of summer.

As I have aged, I have become even more contemplative concerning the shortening of my earthly days. When young, such thoughts rarely crossed my mind. If they had, there would be more “I love you”s spoken, more hugs shared, and more prayers fervently offered. I would not have taken times shared with family members and friends so much for granted without wondering whether other opportunities would arise in the future.

I also would not have taken my relationship with God so lightly. When young, you often feel that there will be time for that later in life; at least, I did. Deep down, I knew better. Like many, my childhood was filled with Sunday school lessons, summer VBS classes, weekly church services, choir practices, and youth group activities. My church was a focal point of my life; even throughout my teen-age years. Somehow, though, as adulthood came upon me, my priorities got messed up. I had a job to prepare for, a house to maintain, a yard to take care of, and, yes, a social life to enjoy. My relationship with God? There would be time to foster that later.

We are cautioned in Luke 12:40 “…be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” I guess I was lucky. One day, someone important to me “called me out” about my falling away from the church. He was right. Our talk made me realize that there was something significant missing in my life and I vowed to correct it. I was fortunate to find this church as it mirrored the church of my youth. Here, I have been blessed to hear the word of God spoken, reminding me both of the law of the Old Testament and the promises of the New Testament.

So, now, as my days here on this year shorten, I can face my uncertain earthly future with one certainty: as undeserving though I be, Christ died for me.

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**A Message about Saving Pop Tabs ~** Marie Flaugher

Since Thrivent is no longer doing the Ronald McDonald House pop tab challenge, I have decided to continue collecting tabs to be used to directly benefit YOU, the members that save them! I have cashed in the tabs that I have and, so far, have a little less than $50.  If anyone has a suggestion for this money, please see me.  If no immediate need is seen, I will keep adding to that.  Please contact me with questions and keep on collecting!

Collected tabs can still be left in marked containers or in the library.

The **Altar Guild** work day, originally scheduled for August 19th has been canceled.

The next **AG** meeting will be **September 16th** at 1 pm. All women in the church are invited to attend!

**OUR 3rd QUARTER MISSION:**

***LUTHER CLASSICAL COLLEGE***

This year’s third quarter mission is support of Luther Classical College.

Luther Classical College will open in the fall of 2025 on the campus of Mount Hope Lutheran Church and School in Casper, WY.

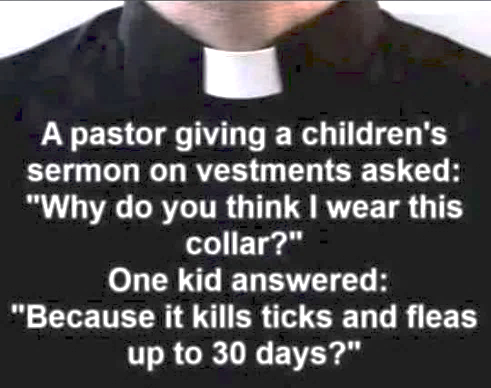
The college will offer an A.A. and a B.A. in Classical Liberal Arts and will provide a conservative, classical Lutheran education. With a stress on the priority of a Christian lifestyle and a cultivation of confessional Lutheranism, the college will offer coursework within a purposefully Christian and Lutheran framework.

Plans are for the college to be open only to Lutherans and not to ever exceed 300 undergraduates. LCC is committed to remain affordable and yearly tuition will be set at $8,500 a year with available scholarship opportunities.

Donations to Luther Classical College can be put in a pew envelope and placed in the offering plate. Please be certain to note your name and designate your donation for the 3rd Quarter Mission.

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**Maybe we should all think like children! Go directly to the** **heart of the question!**



Submitted by Evelyn Baisch.

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**Community Day 2023:**

**ON HOLD**

The organizers for Community Day 2023-Pastor Deal, Diane Riefstahl, and Jesse Riffle-have decided to put this year’s plans for Community Day “on hold” at this time. In order for the event, as previously conducted, to live up to expectations, a strong commitment of volunteers was needed. Lacking that commitment, it has been determined that it is time to re-evaluate the event and find new avenues of reaching out to our neighbors and community.

Anyone with ideas for future plans, who is willing to work with the committee on bringing them to fruition, is asked to reach out to one of the organizers.

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**SCRIP Program:**

The next date for **SCRIP orders and payments** is Sunday, August 6th. Checks should be made out to Sts. Peter & Paul’s and are to be given to Matt Berent or placed in the offering plate. You should receive your gift cards the following week.

If you should be absent the Sunday on which cards are ready, please see either Jonathan Baisch or Delores Fee after church the following week to get your cards from the church safe

Forms for ordering gift cards are available on tables in the narthex and next to the nursery.

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**Word of Hope: 1-888-217-8679**

The only 24/7 CONFIDENTIAL Hotline that is distinctly Lutheran, bringing healing found in Christ, to those whose hearts have been broken by abortion.

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Sincere “thanks” are expressed to **Catherine Carr** who is taking a break from her role as our church organist. Catherine’s talent and her willingness to share that talent have enhanced our worship services for the past several years.

The position of church organist will now be filled by new member  **Rebecca Marquette**. We give many “thanks” for her God-given talent and desire to fulfill this role.

We are truly blessed!

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**Heartfelt sympathy** is extended to Rebecca & Gordon Marquette upon the passing of Rebecca’s father, Martin Anderson, Saturday, July 8th. Condolences may be sent to the Marquette’s and Rebecca’s mother, Mary Jane Anderson, c/o 4046 Ellwood Rd., New Castle, PA, 16101.

May those who mourn his passing take comfort that he is now resting in the arms of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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**IS THE LECTIONARY ACTUALLY IMPORTANT?**

By Rev. Evan Scamman

*Pr. Scamman is Pastor of Saint Paul Lutheran Church in Greenwich, CT, a supporting congregation of Luther Classical College. This article appeared in the July, 2023, issue of “Ad Fontes”, published by Luther Classical College.*

I grew up in a Pentecostal sort of church that had never used the lectionary. Why would we? Wasn't it better to be led by the Holy Spirit than to be tied down to any specific readings? Instead of preaching on a limited number of Biblical texts, our pastor preached from the whole Bible. Except that he didn't. That's the problem with "free-texting," as it is sometimes called. Although the pastor was free to preach on the entire Bible, his two-hour sermons generally fell back on one of his favorite passages. The story of Sanballat and Tobiah served to rebuke any members who were complaining against the work of "building up the walls of Jerusalem." When Elijah directed the starving widow of Zarephath to "bake me a cake," this meant that we were to put more in the offering plate, even when we had next to nothing to give. And the Road to Emmaus was a great opportunity to hear once again that we were "fools and slow of heart to believe that the prophets had said." It's not that what was said was inherently problematic, though some of it certainly was. The real problem lay in what was never said or taught. Before becoming a Lutheran, I had never heard, for example, a sermon about heaven. This fundamental Christian doctrine wasn't of interest to my former pastor, who was more focused on "building God’s kingdom" here on earth. Only after becoming a Lutheran and being immersed within the yearly cycle of the lectionary, did I come to recognize my previous pastor’s failure to preach "the whole counsel of God." It seems paradoxical that free-texting pastors would tend to preach less of the Bible than those who follow the lectionary, but this generally proves true. In fact, one of the great benefits of using the lectionary is that pastors are forced to preach on passages and topics they might otherwise avoid. The lectionary protects the flock of God from "hobby-horse" preaching, and presents the whole counsel of God to His people, building them up in the faith, precept upon precept, line upon line.

A pastor is not free to speak as he pleases. He must speak as he is commanded. Therefore, every faithful pastor must contend with the world, the devil, and his own sinful nature, which all conspire to entice him into voicing his own thoughts and opinions from the pulpit. Free–texting, though not inherently, sinful, tends to steer a pastor into the danger of prophesying of himself, that is, speaking his own words. Jesus said that not even the Holy Spirit will speak "of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak" (John 16:13). How much more must mortal pastors be careful to speak only what they hear from the Word of God.

Consider the difference in process between a pastor who uses the lectionary, and one who free–texts based on a self-chosen topic. The first is more likely to approach the Scriptures asking, "What does God have to say to His people today?" while the latter, having already decided what he wants to say, then searches the Bible for verses to support his chosen topic. This is not to say that a pastor cannot give a faithful and topical sermon– in fact, there may be times where this is necessary – but as a general rule, free-texting should be avoided, since it opens the door to many potential dangers: cherry-picking from the Word of God, avoiding uncomfortable truths, hobby-horse preaching, and even falling into serious doctrinal error.

Early in my seminary training, I wrongly assumed that it would be sometimes necessary to depart from the lectionary in order to address specific issues as they arose in my parish or in the surrounding culture. I have never once found this to be necessary. Instead, the appointed texts have consistently and miraculously proven to be far more applicable to the situation at hand than anything I might have chosen myself. For example, during COVID, while many people were fearfully avoiding church, the appointed Psalm for the Fourth Sunday of Lent began with these words: "I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let's go to the house of the Lord‘" (Psalm 122). That same day, at the height of the toilet paper hoarding, Holy Scripture reminded us of how the fearful Israelites hoarded manna until it bred worms and stank (Exodus 16). But most importantly, we heard of the tender provision of our Lord Jesus for His people, as He fed them with bread in the wilderness (John 6).

The fathers of the church, who were much wiser than we – and likely better topical preachers when the need arose – nevertheless chose to follow the constraints of the lectionary. They did not view the prescribed set of readings as a muzzle upon the Holy Spirit, but rather, as a means by which He accomplishes His work of bringing all the words of Jesus to our remembrance. The lectionary has served the church as a hedge of protection against false teachers and their pet agendas even as it has helped to present us with the whole counsel of God. May this sound pattern of words continue to aid and strengthen the church as we earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto all the saints.

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Copies of the **“Reading the Bible in Six Months”** schedule are available in the narthex and adjacent to the nursery.