

Peace Lutheran Church

FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER

Where Everybody is Somebody Because Jesus Christ is Lord!



Ministers: The Congregation
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SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
26	27	28	29	30	31	Feb 1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
10:00 Sunday School 9:00 Worship						
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
10:00 Sunday School 9:00 Worship	Pastor Ian on Vacation					
		Office Closed		5:30 Council Meeting		
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Pastor Ian on Vacation						
Office Closed						
10:00 Sunday School 9:00 Worship						
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
10:00 Sunday School 12:30-3:30 Confirma 9:00 Worship						
			7:00 Ash Wednesday			

Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’” Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Dear Siblings in Christ,

When I taught on the Pine Ridge Reservation the tribe had set aside what was called “Teacher Housing.” Essentially it was a neighborhood right behind the school in which teachers were allowed to live because housing on the reservation was limited and non tribal members like myself needed a place to live. When we first moved in, the school had assigned me to live in an adequate, but not all together nice, apartment. Everyone wanted one of the much more updated houses, but being a first year teacher I had to put in my time. Joe, who would become my best friend, was assigned the apartment right above me.

As it turns out, a teacher quit in the middle of the year and therefore had to vacate their house. Joe and I pounced on the chance to leave our apartments behind a live together in the much bigger house. We moved right before Christmas break, which turns out is not a very good idea in South Dakota. It was cold!

When we returned to our house after the break, we decided to throw a housewarming party and invite all of our new friends over. Since we decided Saturday, January 6th was a good day to host it, I took to calling it an “Epiphany Party.” We even had “Epiphany Party” put on a cookie cake from Sam’s Club.

Truth be told, I did that mostly to be funny. It was January 6th so why not connect our housing warming party to Epiphany, even if it didn’t make a whole lot of sense? A lot of those attending the party had no idea what Epiphany even was! However, looking back there is an important connection that I failed to make. Epiphany and the Time After Epiphany are seasons in which we remember how our God revealed Godself to us in the midst of a broken world. God reveals Godself to us as a baby in a manger, through Jesus’ presentation at the temple, through the baptism of Christ by John the Baptist and through mountaintop experiences. Christ is revealed to us in new and exciting ways that show us who our Messiah is, and how our God intends to operate in this world.

South Dakota, teaching remedial high school math, was difficult. Truth be told, I know math is important but the subject matter is certainly not one of my passions. Kids on the reservation are full of hope, but like anywhere, there was plenty of despair. I had never taught before and some days the weekends could not come soon enough. Joe and I would spend nights grading papers while we watched Netflix. We would spend Saturdays driving to Rapid City to grocery shop together. We would spend mornings making pancakes. We psyched each other up for another day of teaching on our short walks to school. We became great friends. Christ manifested Christself in Joe during those couple of years. Joe was the friend I needed during tough times and the light of humor I needed to keep going. He was the little manifestation of Christ that I needed to keep laughing, keep teaching, keep wondering and exploring the possibilities.

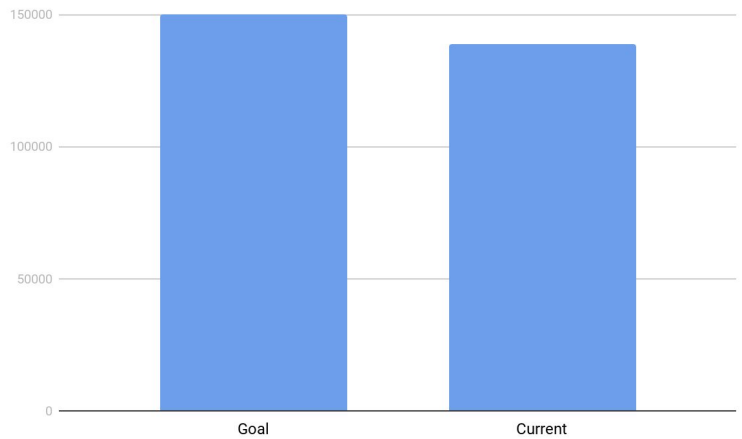
So on that day in which we celebrated Joe and I becoming roommates, maybe Epiphany was more at the center than I even realized. Maybe Christ was celebrating the small things in our lives that make us happy, encourage us, keep us going? Maybe Christ is manifested in the small things this day? Maybe Christ continues to manifest Christself in the big things too? So I encourage you to take a moment to ponder how God is at work in your life during this season. Take a moment to recognize how Christ might be talking to you through the people around you. What is Christ saying to you this season? What are some of the ways Christ has manifested Christself to you this day? Both big and small! This is the season to intentionally take notice of those ways, and to give thanks for a God that intervenes in this world on our behalf, especially through other people and through the creation which God has made.

Pastor Ian

If you are interested in setting up electronic giving through VANCO, please contact the Office Administrator at peacelutherancolfax@gmail.com.

Growing into God's Future
Campaign News

We are inching closer to our goal of \$150,000. As of the January 27th, we have raised \$139,005.74



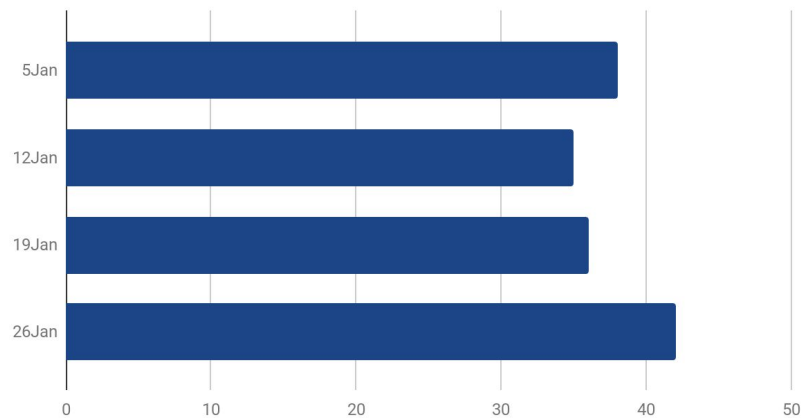
Birthdays

- 3rd - Marilyn Wigen
- 5th - Robin Cocking
- 10th - Emma Nelson
- 11th - Stephanie Van Time & Pete Wigen
- 15th - Brady Cornelius
- 17th - Chandra Maki
- 21st - Catherine Olson
- 25th - Marvin Wigen
- 28th - Judy Larkin

Anniversaries

- 9th - Russ & Sandy Jamison (1991)
- 11th - Don & Barbara Henderson (1995)
- 16th - Monty & Carolyn Wilson (1985)

Sunday Attendance



A Visual Recap of the Confirmation Camp at Lutherhaven





Bishop Kristen Kuempel Bishop's Annual Meeting Letter January 2020

Just a few, short days ago we entered another decade. We hoped for better days ahead. But millions of acres of Australia are on fire, we seem to be teetering on the brink of WWII, our government is in chaos, our climate is reliably unreliable, and as if that wasn't enough: we gather together here in buildings that are no longer the center of community life that they once were.

I confess to entering the New Year in a bit of a funk. It wasn't a full-blown depression...it was despair. Looking around, it seems as though most of the touchpoints in my life are wobbling precariously. I wonder, beloved of God, if you feel the same.

I had a vivid dream the other night. I had been asked to preach at a congregation (nothing strange yet). I was excited to do so, as this was a congregation that had a reputation for innovative worship and a large number of children and youth and young people. In the dream, I sat quietly while the youth led the main part of the worship service and watched the people in the pews engaging worship in a way that one rarely witnesses in Lutheran congregations. Then it was time for me to preach. I stood and began to speak. The sound system cut out. The sound operator offered a different microphone. I began again. The sound system cut out. Yet another microphone. Yet another malfunction. At one point, someone handed me a megaphone and I began to preach the sermon through that. But then I lost my voice! I remember vividly the struggle to get words out, the way the congregation offered encouragement, but the more I tried to shout, the more I choked in the dream. I woke to Matthew shaking my arm. I had been shouting "Perfect love casts out fear!" (1 John 4:18) over and over again.

Perfect love casts out fear.

There's a lot to be afraid of these days, isn't there? The list certainly doesn't seem to be getting any shorter, at any rate. But when the church is one of the things we're fearful for: what do we do?

I do not believe that the Church (one, holy, catholic and apostolic) is dying. It cannot. God is in the midst of her, and she will not be moved.

But the post-WWII way of doing church in America certainly is on life support, if it's not outright dead. And when that is the church you know and love: knowing the whole Church is fine is cold comfort at best. When we use the word "church" we usually mean our specific congregation, particularly the building that congregation calls home. Perhaps that font is the one you were baptized at, and your children, and now: your grandchildren. Maybe your beloved's funeral sermon was preached from that pulpit. Maybe you've replaced more shingles than you can count on that roof, or crawled around the furnace hoping and praying for just one more winter out of the old thing. Maybe you were married in that sanctuary. That building holds the stained glass window that you look at when the sermon gets boring. That room was where you were first introduced to the wonder of "Silent Night" on Christmas Eve, or where you helped wrangle 40 Sunday School students in the Christmas pageant. Maybe you and fifty of your closest middle school friends were confirmed kneeling at the altar rail, hair carefully shellacked into place wearing a white robe & a red carnation.

And when we think of losing these places: we grieve indeed. When we think of how few people are finding their way to our pews: we grieve. When we attend the funeral of a key giver in the Bishop Kristen Kuempel Bishop's Annual Meeting Letter January 2020 congregation, knowing that their giving supported 30% of the annual budget: we grieve. The way people interact with their church has changed. People no longer come to church to serve the church, but to be served by the church. If you

are in congregational leadership you know the hardest things you have to do is try and turn one penny into two, and find people willing to give their time to serve. Not just on council—but in any way!

Our first response to this is often to lay blame. Lay blame on the pastor (“if we could only have a young pastor with a young family, we would have more members!” or “if only we had someone more experienced than a young pastor. Pastor is a good person, they just don’t know what they’re doing. If they did: we wouldn’t be having these problems.”). Lay blame on generations (“those Millennials are killing the church!” or “Generation X is just so apathetic. They might show up, but they won’t DO anything!” or “I’d go to church, but the Boomers won’t let anyone else take on leadership roles.”). Lay blame on worship style (“If we had a contemporary worship service, people would come like crazy!” or “It’s this contemporary worship, there’s nothing to it. We need the liturgy and the good old hymns. People need traditional worship when life is chaotic.”) We look at the big box non-denominational churches in our community enviously, not aware that many of them are losing as many members as they gain—sometimes they are called a “revolving door church” (from the book *Sticky Church*). And then there are times when the Lutheran congregation across town is going gangbusters, and we wonder why many of those folks drive right past our church to go to that one. We try one trendy thing after another, growing more and more despairing when the decline continues. And so we double down on what church means to us as an individual, forgetting in our panic that the Church was never, ever intended to be about the individual.

I said in my election process that God has provided everything we need to do the ministry God has for us to do. We are waiting for absolutely nothing. I still think that’s true. But I think we are doing a magnificent job of ignoring the guiding of the Spirit—as we pour more and more resources into ministries that no longer function to do anything save to validate our individual preferences. The two biggest items in most church budgets are staff salaries and building maintenance. Some congregations consider going without a pastor in order to continue propping up the building that houses a skeletal congregation—not enough people willing or able to do the work that needs to be done.

Some of you might be angry at me right now. That’s fair. I’m a little squiffy with myself, to be honest. I wish with everything in me that there was an easy fix. That if a council just read the right book, or stumbled upon the right liturgy or found the right pastor we could correct this downward trajectory most of our congregations are facing. And having found the solution, we could carry on.

But as long as the church we love is actually about what we want: we are committing nothing more than well-disguised idolatry. The Church is not the building. It’s not the programming. It’s the people of God, gathered together around Word & Sacrament, fed and forgiven to go and be the hands and feet of God in the world.

Perfect love casts out fear.

When nations rage and all the cornerstones of our lives seem suddenly built on sand, it makes sense that we would turn to our faith for comfort. And I wonder, as more and more of those touchpoints are taken from us if the Spirit is taking away all we depend on that isn’t God. Because it is only by depending on God that we can move into whatever future God has planned for the congregations of the Northwest Intermountain Synod.

Perfect love casts out fear.

The perfect love of God, made incarnate by Jesus, Emmanuel, God With Us, is the love that surrounds us. Now, and always. That perfect love of God comes to us without requirement, but a warning: I the Lord your God am a jealous God. God will tolerate no other taking the trust, faith, commitment, love, work, joy, prayers, and resources that rightly belong to God alone. And as I ponder the future, our synod, the role I am being asked to play in those two things, I become more and more

sure that this time of fear and uncertainty is precisely because we have placed our faith in things other than God.

Perfect love casts out fear.

This year, the synod office will be asking some fierce questions of pastors and congregations. We will be asking them in an effort to get to the truth of what each congregation needs to do to move forward. For some, it might be moving to a different physical location to save the cost of building maintenance. For others, it might be partnering with other congregations in new and untried ways. For a few of you, it might be honestly admitting that your congregation is on a hospice journey—“I don’t care if this congregation lasts after I’m gone, as long as it’s here to do my funeral”. We do this work together—our synod assembly 2019 theme “Walking Together” continues to serve—with the understanding that there are very few wrong answers, and that the true mistake is not asking the questions because we’re afraid of what the answers will be.

Will you join me? Will you join me in leaning hard against the perfect love of God that casts out fear? Will you remind me of that when I forget? Because I will. Will you join me in asking hard questions? Will you join me in reflecting on honest answers? Will you listen for the Voice of God with me, that loving Voice that seeks always to guide us? Will you pray for the courage to do what is right, not what is easy? Will you join me in confronting hard truths about ourselves and the way we have not been what we should have as the church? Will you join me in making the changes so we can be?

In this world of uncertainty, we stand on the Rock. While the world burns away into chaos and hatred, we gather together: the Family of God. Not protected from the tumult and tragedy, but sent by God to be God’s presence in the midst of it. Together.

This feels so risky. But remember: Perfect love casts out fear. Will you join me in walking in love for those outside our walls, for one another, and for ourselves?

Join me.

Bishop Kristen Kuempel