



# BULLETIN

BRINGING GOD'S MESSAGE OF LOVE IN CHRIST JESUS TO ALL THE WORLD

## The Lutheran Church – International

and the

## World Lutheran Parish

FEBRUARY 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ in the LC-I Family,

The appointed Scripture readings for the Lenten season are intended to help us prepare for Lent and the coming celebration of the Resurrection of Our Lord — Easter. Although Christmas and the Christmas season tend to get more attention because of secular influences, it is Easter that is the central celebration in the Christian life. Liturgically, it is often referred to as the “Queen of Feasts.” During the time after Epiphany the selections of Bible readings at Sunday worship lead us to Lent and the ultimate victory of Christ on the Cross. Our liturgical practices as an Evangelical catholic body in the Lutheran understanding help us during our Lenten journey.

One of the blessings we have in the Lutheran Church–International is that we live our Christian faith in Christ as an integral part of the universal Christian Church. Our LC–I Synods have consistently affirmed our “catholic” heritage. In addition, the appointed readings of the Common Lectionary help us to more fully understand who Christ is, and who He can be in our lives.

### Lenten Practices, Past and Present

During the forty days of Lent it has been the tradition in the Universal-catholic Church to honor Christ's sufferings for us on the cross with acts of “mortification” activities that allow us to assert control over our bodies for the sake of the life in Christ. On Ash Wednesday, the first day of the Lenten season, our churches observe the imposition of ashes. As we receive the ashes, we are reminded that we are dust, and we will return to dust. It is noteworthy that the ashes are imposed on the forehead in the sign of the Cross, the emblem of our salvation through the blood of Christ.

The victory is won, but we remain as sinners who must be grateful for Christ's saving love for us through His death on the cross. None of our works, including Lenten practices, can bring us salvation. The blood of Christ has already done that, but we as followers of Christ can show gratitude for His saving grace through our actions.



++Robert W. Hotes  
Archbishop, Lutheran Church International

In religious communities during medieval times and in some religious communities today, sackcloth is used as clothing to irritate the skin and as a reminder of one's mortality. Mini- versions of the garments are called scapulars. Another practice, from the Middle Ages called “flagellation” is done as penitents whip themselves until their raw flesh bleeds. It is a practice that is still done today by certain groups.

### Fasting and Abstinence

The more common practices of fasting and abstinence during Lent have continued throughout the history of the Church. Fasting and abstinence

are common in many communities of faith in the United States, Canada, South America, and other regions where the LC–I has its ministries. They are helpful reminders of Christ's suffering for us, but they are not necessary for salvation. Christ has already paid the price.

*“We do not become righteous by doing righteous deeds but, having been made righteous, we do righteous deeds.” –Martin Luther*

Expressing our gratitude and faith in Christ in some way is important during our Lenten journey. The Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions should guide us in Lent and at all other times. Taking advantage of the many Lenten worship opportunities available

in our churches will also help us to focus our hearts and minds on what our Lord has accomplished for us through his suffering and death. Taken all together, these things will help us in our efforts to help in bringing about God's Kingdom.

Above all, Lent helps us recall that faith itself is a valuable gift of God for which we can be grateful. We are all important to the work of God's Kingdom. How wonderful it might be if during this Lenten all of us in the LC-I would spread the good news of the Gospel more diligently, pray through Scripture more often, and show even greater love and kindness to our neighbors.

During Lent let us share the good news of the Gospel through our work in the LC-I. May we spread the word about our Evangelical catholic identity and the special missions we have in Christ's Christian and universal church given clarity through the lens of our Lutheran understanding.

### 2023 Annual Assembly

In closing, please be aware that the dates for the **2023 LC-I Synod Gathering** have been set for **June 27-28, 2023**. Per request of the LC-I membership, the Executive Board has explored holding the Synod in Maryland this year. The locations being considered are Frederick MD or Hagerstown MD, both relatively close to major airports. Full details will be available through email after the Board meeting on April 12, 2023, or before if possible. Feedback on this decision is welcome. Please save the dates!

May God continue bless our ministries in Christ's name and may we find joy in those ministries!

**++Robert**  
Archbishop

### Reminder for Our Readers

The Editors of the LC-I and World Lutheran Parish BULLETIN are always eager to receive news of interest to the friends, members, and ministries of the LC-I. All items must have relevance to the identity and mission of the LC-I as expressed in our Constitution. A copy of the Constitution is available on the LC-I website. The LC-I reserves the right to approve all content and the right to copyright any material published with permission of the author(s).

### *Also from Our Archbishop's Desk*

- \* The LC-I has opportunities for men who are interested in answering a call as pastors/presbyters and women and men who are called to consider diaconal ministry. Please encourage individuals who express an interest to contact the Archbishop's office or their local bishop ordinary.
- \* Communication is important for the life of the Church. Please be sure to keep in contact with your local bishop (Bishop Ordinary) or the Archbishop's Office on a regular basis.
- \* The LC-I BULLETIN welcomes contributions that highlight activities of parishes and other activities of the LC-I. Articles for the BULLETIN should reflect the mission and values of the LC-I and have a direct relation to our mission as an Evangelical catholic church body. An additional publication of a more technically theological nature is being planned for the near future. Guidelines for submissions and suggestions for topic parameters will be published soon.
- \* If you have not reviewed the updates to the LC-I Constitution made at Synod in 2022, please take time to go to our website to review the text. Several changes to the Bylaws regarding good standing are important to each member. There are also changes to the Constitution itself. Contact your local bishop or the archbishop's office with any questions. The full text of the Constitution is available on the LC-I website or from the LC-I Secretary. It is essential for all LC-I members to be familiar with the Constitution.
- \* The LC-I will have an in-person Executive Board meeting scheduled for April 12, 2023. The meeting is scheduled for Holy Family Episcopal Missionary Church in the Frederick, Maryland area. If you have ideas, thoughts, or concerns, please contact your Bishop or other board member prior to that date.
- \* **Please note once again:** The LC-I central office number has changed. Messages can be left at **315-946-9251**. Please do not hesitate to call **217-691-3090** if you would like to speak to the Archbishop directly. Texts are always welcome. We would love to hear news of your ministries.
- \* The work of the LC-I Pastoral Formation group is progressing. Important announcements will be forthcoming soon.



## SPECIAL PRAYER REQUESTS

These prayers have been requested through communication to the Archbishop's office. Please include them in your personal prayers and in the prayers of your congregation and let us know of others to be included in our prayers.

- For those suffering from the effects of the earthquakes in Syria and Turkey.
- For those suffering from war in Ethiopia, Somalia, Ukraine and around the world.
- For the LC-I missions in India under the guidance of Missionary Dean Prasad.
- In thanksgiving for the communications ministries of Pastors Wigmore, Ettlmyer, and Hebbeler.
- For all those in the LC-I who are in special need of God's healing grace.
- For the special intentions of St. Paul's parish, Sacramento California.
- For the Members of the Society of the Holy Trinity (STS) as they strive to live the beauty of the Lutheran liturgy.
- For the Lutheran Diaconal Society (thelda.org). Please keep them in mind when you are thinking of contributions.
- For Bishop Richard Horn who is quarantined with COVID and for his wife, Ute, who has continued to be healthy so far.
- For Deacon Helena Morris and Deaconess Christine Stephenson who are recovering from illness.
- For the ministries of Dean Emeritus Pastor David Rogers and his ecumenical ministries, especially for his contacts in the Jewish community in Indiana. They and other Jewish brothers and sisters have been threatened with hate and violence.

- For the LC-I Canadian ministries and Fr. Larry Goodenough.
- For Pastor William Babbitt and his ministries in Florida.
- For the people of Turkey and Syria who have suffered the loss of loved ones and homes following the devastating earthquake.
- For families and individuals who have suffered illness and death from the effects of Fentanyl.
- For prayers for our partner in ministry in Brazil, the Reverend Dr. Nelson Magalhaes Costa Filho.
- For all members of the World Lutheran Parish.

*"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. It is laying hold of His willingness." – Martin Luther*

### WE PRAY WITH THANKSGIVING FOR...

- Our Archbishop and all of our Bishops, past and present for their spiritual guidance and prayers.
- All the saints in the Church Militant as they make their Lenten journey in preparation for Holy Week.
- Our loved ones and all the saints in the Church Triumphant who are feasting at the heavenly banquet table.
- Our brothers and sisters at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Christ, Rosedale, Queens, NY as they prepare for their 110th Anniversary Celebration on May 7, 2023.
- The ministries of Pastor John Schilling. He reports that all is well by God's grace.
- All members of the LC-I Executive Board.

*"The whole being of any Christian is faith and love. Faith brings the person to God; love brings the person to people." –Martin Luther*



## Prayer, Praise, and Thanksgiving

### 110th Congregational Celebration to Be Held

The Archbishop, Bishops, Pastors, Religious, and all members of the Lutheran Church – International join in offering prayer, praise and thanksgiving on the occasion of the 110th Anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Christ, Rosedale, Queens, New York. Special plans are being made for a wonderful celebration of the congregation's mission and ministry for over a century. Details may be had from the church's event organizer, Beth Damm Diodato (631-338-6470) or Interim Pastor Thomas Robinson (516-329-4463). This congregation is a living witness to the best expression of our Lutheran identity in Word and Sacrament.



Exterior View of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Christ  
Northeastern Diocese, Lutheran Church – International



Interior View, Christ Church, Rosedale



View of the Main Altar, Christ Church, Rosedale

## 2022-2023 LC-I OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE BOARD

*(Terms end as indicated.)*

### Archbishop

The Most Rev. Dr. Robert W. Hotes  
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### Vice President (2023)

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### Bishop Emeritus

The Rt. Rev. Richard M. Johnson  
Faith1944@bellsouth.net



## A Visit to St. Augustine's Retreat House

In mid-February Deacon Eric Frank had an overnight stay at St. Augustine's House. He and Bishop Jeffrey had time to catch up on things are going at Zion and also took time to discuss the history of the liturgy. Eric will begin a more structured study with Pastor Rodney Eberhardt soon.



*Brother Richard, Prior of St. Augustine's House, Deacon Eric Frank, Cherie, and Bishop Jeffrey Bischoff during their recent visit.*

*"A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." –Martin Luther*

*"Treatise on Christian Liberty"*



# The Lutheran Church – International

*Our Faithful International Partners*

## In Venezuela

Evidence of continued growth for the churches of South America is evident from the photo of the Confirmation Class at Iglesia Luterana Cristo Vencedor. What a blessing!



Iglesia Luterana Cristo Vencedor – Confirmation Class

## In India

The LC-I missions ministries continue to grow in India under the guidance of Missionary Dean Taniku Prasad. There are currently 5 congregations with a leader and significant membership in each. The pictures below show non-regional gatherings for worship.





*First Lutheran Church, Lyons, New York  
LC-I Headquarters Church and Archbishop's Office*

### **Reminder –2023 Dues**

FOR CONTINUING SUPPORT OF THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE LC – I

Clergy and Lay Minister Membership Dues: \$75.00 U.S.D.

Congregations / Communities of Faith Membership Dues: \$150.00 U.S.D.

Please maintain your good standing and credentialing! The dues are required for ordained and lay members and communities of faith who have been received and included on the official ministerial roster of the LC-I. All additional contributions, gifts, and bequests are gratefully received.

*SPECIAL NOTE: Unable to meet your responsibility for 2023 dues? Contact your bishop as soon as possible.*

## **LUTHERAN CHURCH – INTERNATIONAL**

### **2023 MEMBERSHIP DUES AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

\_\_\_\_\_ 2023 Dues for Ministerial Members: \$75

\_\_\_\_\_ 2023 Dues for Congregations and Communities of Faith: **\$150**

\_\_\_\_\_ Gift \_\_\_\_\_ Bequest (*Amount*) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ In Memory \_\_\_\_\_ In Thankfulness

For \_\_\_\_\_

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**SEND TO:** The Rev. William Wigmore, Treasurer  
15 High Street  
Lyons NY 14489

**OR** PastorWigmore@gmail.com (1-215-416-9591)

# *Special Lenten Offering of Food for Thought*

The Reverend Rodney L. Eberhardt

## **Manifesto for the Church in Crisis November 2022**

*In response to a request by Archbishop Robert Hotes, I present this article based on a recent presentation to a Lutheran congregation as a manifesto. I offer it as a resource for the purpose of beginning a reflection by the Lutheran Church-International (LC-I) on our work as a community of faith in and for a dying world. I believe we have an opportunity to make a significant contribution to the ecclesial morass that the church faces in the 21st century.*

### ***Today, Culture Doesn't Listen to the Church***

I was ordained to the Holy Ministry on January 6, 1979, and during my 43 years of ministry I spoke frequently of the death of Christendom. For some time now it has been common to speak of Christendom, i.e., the marriage of the church and western culture initiated by Constantine and the church in 313 A.D., as dying. The various battles over Scriptural interpretation, doctrinal disputes, and the church's action to imitate the ethics of the world on issues of sex, marriage, abortion, sexual misconduct of clergy, the abandonment by most mainline seminaries of theological education in favor of "social justice" activism, and the church's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is clear that Christendom is not dying. It is dead. This may seem an extreme statement but compare the cultural and religious life of the 1950s which is easy to do if you listen to Sirius XM radio, and it becomes clear that culture no longer supports or even listens to what the church says or does. The repeated cultural attacks on core issues of ethics around sex and marriage, abortion, creation, and the sacredness of human life to name just a few, are evident everywhere. It is not my intention to talk politics and political rather, I seek to point out how at odds the church's historical teaching is with the current cultural and political environment. The current cultural and theological battles express the reality that the marriage of church and the culture/state that governed western civilization for the last 1700 years has collapsed. This reality has significant implications for the church as it seeks to find its way in this unprecedented situation. This is not the first time the church has found itself in this

situation. In the first three centuries of the church's history the faithful lived, moved and had their being in an environment that was hostile to the church. Their life was characterized by living, worshipping, and witnessing largely in secret. The church's public witness consisted almost exclusively in public martyrdom.

This period was the spring of time of the church. While it is impossible to simply reprimatinate the church of the first through the third centuries, there is much guidance and help that can be gained from the experience of the ancient church.

### ***Needed: Renewal, Reflection, Repentance, Prayer***

Borrowing a phrase from Martin Luther's catechism, what is "most certainly true" is that the Christian way of life as practiced for generations must change. This can be seen in the many proposals that come from denominational conventions and headquarters that are mostly the overanxious response of the church to the death of Christendom. Most of these change initiatives take their cue from the world's agenda and seek to preserve the institutions to which we are accustomed and love so dearly. While it is true that we face unprecedented challenges and changes, what the church needs now is renewal, reflection, repentance, and prayer – searching for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Carl R. Truman recently published a work entitled **STRANGE NEW WORLD**. It is synopsis of his earlier work, **THE RISE AND TRIUMPH OF THE MODERN SELF**. I highly recommend this book for your own reading and study to help equip you as a Christian living in **A BRAVE NEW WORLD**—the book by Aldus Huxley. Dr. Truman's fundamental concepts can help us understand what orthodox Christians are facing in the 21st century and can guide us in charting a course as we move into the future as the body of Christ. As a reform movement within the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, Lutheranism also has some unique theological tools both historic and biblical that can aid the Christian community in charting the path we must walk into the future that is already upon us.

In **STRANGE NEW WORLD** Dr. Truman analyses our current cultural chaos by reviewing the



insights of contemporary and historic thinkers and artists who gave expression to the post-modern world view that includes the sexual revolution, technological development, and cultural revisionism. We are unknowingly surrounded by ideas that are deconstructing the world we have known.

The developments he traces laid the foundation for constructs that have led most of us to believe ideas today that every one of our grandparents would have rejected out of hand without need of argument, evidence, or proof, just two generations ago. I will not even attempt to trace these historic ideas as I leave the book itself for that, but I would like to introduce you to two concepts in Dr. Turman's thought that will help Christians to begin to chart a course through the minefield of our contemporary world.

### *Expressive Individualism*

The first of these concepts is the ascendancy of what he describes as "expressive individualism." Expressive individualism seeks to give precedence to the authenticity of feelings, and self over against adherence to transcendent truths. The post-modern person is not accountable to theologians who preach on how to conform oneself to God but to the therapists who counsel them how to be true to oneself. Expressive individualism places total emphasis on how individuals feel about something rather than what some outside construct suggests we should think in developing the beliefs on which we build our lives. We are told to look inward to find truth and not outward toward God. This is the fountainhead of the conflicts that have arisen between the church and the world in recent decades. The concept of expressive individualism runs directly counter to the biblical view of reality where turning inward is precisely the church's definition of sin. Expressive individualism dismantles concepts like revelation, sin, creation, and the source of life that are foundational to historic Christian doctrine, faith, and life. The self becomes the source of all truth, insight and meaning.

### *Social Imaginary*

The second important concept that Dr. Truman presents in his book is the concept of the "social imaginary." It is an awkward term using the adjective "imaginary" as if it were a noun. This concept conveys an important idea. Social imaginary suggests that

ordinary people imagine their social surroundings by images, stories, legends, and ritual practices that are shared by large groups of people if not the whole society. Social imaginary makes possible common practices and beliefs that are widely shared by a large if not all segments of a general population. People do not typically think about what they believe and how they act in consistently self-conscious terms. Rather, they are unconsciously shaped by the imaginary presented in the media or social communities. The imaginary then shapes the way we think about morals, life, goals, etc. The so-called mass media and the internet have played a primary role in restructuring the social imaginary of our contemporary world. The way we think about the world today is not shaped primarily by rational arguments based on first principles, but rather by the content of the world's social imaginary captive to expressive individualism. For example, the reason society thinks about sex the way it does is the result of the confluence of a host of factors. The pill made it cheap and easy to separate sex from procreation. In a relatively short span of time, it made sex as recreation a far more practical option than it had in the past. The advent of various publications like "Playboy" and "Cosmopolitan" presented promiscuity as a cool, attractive lifestyle for both men and women. The rise of no-fault divorce reduced marriage to a sentimental bond. The internet massively expanded access to pornography and as a result the social stigma against such practices diminished. Soap operas and sitcoms, comedy, dramas and even commercials present sex as a cost-free necessary pastime that is indispensable to real life. The current social imaginary is in many ways a return to the dominate pagan world view that dominated human civilization for most of human history apart from the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The death of Christendom has been reflected in Lutheranism for perhaps three or four generations. As is true for every Christian denomination, the central issue facing American Lutheranism today is the question of identity. Today the relevant questions are: What is a Christian? Who are we Lutherans? What does it mean to be a Lutheran and a Christian?

### *Lutheranism in the United States*

In most of its history in the United States, Lutheranism sought to define itself along the lines of ethnicity, mainline Protestantism, and the modern social imaginary. From the old arguments about language

to the current conflict over sexual ethics, the goal was to become part of, and leader in the American cultural milieu as one of the largest protestant denominations in America. Most Lutherans had sympathy with that position and saw themselves as Protestants and moderns. The problem with this development is that Christianity has become captive to the ethical and moral decay that is represented by what I would dub the MTV culture where sexual promiscuity, consumerism, and unethical conduct are the norms rather than the exception. As a result, the Christian community has become captive to a religious morass from which we are incapable of extricating ourselves. Theological confusion, biblical relativism and confessional abandonment threaten to destroy the institutional expressions of the church and everything the Reformation's founders sought to accomplish.

There are several consequences of the church's current situation. First, denominational movements have reached a theological and practical dead end. In the past, culture was the glue that held churches together. The norm was everyone needed to find a church that expressed their view of the faith. Today, denominationalism is seen as a repudiation of any truth claim on the part of the church and individual spiritual discernment is the result of seeking something that authenticates the true self. There is no institutional expression of the church that is not currently in serious numerical decline. This is directly attributable to the church's abandonment of the social imaginary of biblical, historical, confessional, and moral clarity. The Lutheran confessional tradition asserted a social imaginary that declared Lutherans are not Protestants but Evangelical Catholics. This is not a term that is readily understandable to most Lutherans so let me define what is meant by "Evangelical" and "Catholic."

Evangelical refers to the first and fundamental principle of the Lutheran tradition, namely, justification by grace through faith. This is the evangelical principle, the rule or norm that governs all that we say and do as Lutherans. Philip Melancthon, the great compatriot of Dr. Martin Luther, claimed this as the central principle or article on which the church stands or falls. The statement "God in Christ justifies us by grace through faith" is a statement of the Gospel, and it is the Gospel that determines who we are, what we say, and how we say it.

## *Our Lutheran Identity as Christians*

Our identity as Christians is rooted in the assertion that God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit has acted, continues to act, and will act for our salvation and the salvation of a world that is captive to sin and cannot free itself. As Lutherans, we assert that redemption from sin and death is first and fundamentally what the world needs. It is something which God alone accomplishes through Christ in the Spirit by means of the once and for all death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who is Lord. God redeems us, makes us his own, and gives us life in Christ as a free gift. It is Christ and Christ alone who saves, by grace alone, through faith alone. This is the *evangelion*, i.e., the evangelical gospel good news which Jesus Christ has brought to our broken and fallen world.

This is the principle that guides, norms and shapes all that we do and say as a Christian community. Our task is to proclaim this once and for all gift of life, hope and salvation for us all, in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, through Word and Sacrament. The evangelical principle rooted in Christ alone tells us that salvation comes to us through means which we as Lutherans (Evangelical Catholics) have identified as the means of grace.

## *The Central Means of Grace*

We have historically seen the preached Word of God, Baptism, Confession and Absolution, and the Eucharist as the central means of grace. In these events of Word and Sacrament, God in Christ offers us justification/salvation as a gift through faith. As Eucharistic Prayer I in the Lutheran Book of Worship proclaims: "*As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*" This is the principal work of the church Lutheran or otherwise. It is the principle on which the church stands or falls; apart from this proclamation, the church ceases to be the church and we are simply captive to a social imaginary which is captive to sin.

Secondly, from its foundation the church understood that it did not invent the Gospel, the church, the preached Word, or the Sacraments, just as they did not invent Jesus Christ. These things were founded on Christ and have a long history beginning with Adam and Eve proceeding through the history of Israel, moving through the work of Christ and into the founding of the church on the person and work

of Christ and the witness of the apostles. The history, they confessed, was shaped by the Holy Spirit and carried within it the essence of what it meant to be Christian. "Catholic" was the term applied to this tradition. The term catholic literally means "according to the whole" and reflects Christian practice down through the ages.

The Third Article of the Creeds with its affirmation of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church was not to be repudiated. The catholic faith with its Gospel heart was not to be renounced. There was only one, holy, apostolic church and that was the Catholic Church. It is the only church that can be known or confessed.

### *Lutheran Confessors and Reform*

What the Lutheran confessors saw was a need for the church to reform itself, to return to its Gospel heart, to renew the traditions of the catholic Church, not abandon them. When Luther sought to provide a liturgy for the reformation movement, it was not a figment of his own imagination which he presented but a reformed and evangelically-centered order of the catholic liturgy, a service of Holy Communion, which he called Deutsche Messe, i.e., German Mass. When extremists claiming to follow Luther destroyed stained glass, tore down statues, white-washed religious paintings, and icons, invented new liturgies and abandoned the Sacraments of the catholic Church, Luther condemned them as pagans and heretics. What Luther sought, what we as Lutherans should seek, is the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church that we confess in the Creeds normed and shaped by the Evangelical Gospel principle of "justification by grace through faith."

Dr. Carl Braaten wrote in his book entitled, **JUSTIFICATION:**

*When we identify ourselves as Catholic, we do not mean Roman Catholic. The Roman label refers to the papal claim to universal authority and magisterial infallibility, neither of which is the essence of the church's catholicity. An evangelical catholic position holds that the church must at the same time be evangelical and catholic."*

Lutherans can only give universal authority and infallibility to Christ. The only norm for us is the Law/Gospel Word of God expressed in the principle

of justification by grace through faith which functions as the norm to determine what is true and false, good, and bad in the substance of catholic tradition. This vision of Lutheranism as evangelical and catholic has guided my own ministry for 43 years.

Our use of the church's traditional liturgies, our weekly celebration of Holy Communion, our use of the church year (colors, prayers and appointed readings), the use of historic liturgical vestments, our use of ritual (processions, sign of the cross and bowing), our use of appointed church furnishings (altar, font, pulpit, gospel throne, processional cross, torches, chalice, altar linens), our use of the classic hymnody and sung services, all of these and many more reflect a commitment to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic faith all normed by the evangelical principle of justification by grace through faith. They are the social imaginary to which our churches must return if we are to survive our current social anarchy.

### *Christ Among Us Still*

According to the evangelical catholic principle--our social imaginary--Christ is among us still, making us whole, giving us life, and forgiving our sins. He does this through the means of grace. The church really is the body of Christ in and for the life of the world. The ministry, the office of public preaching and administration of the sacraments, really is the voice of Christ; the Eucharist really is the body and blood of Christ which offers us the presence of Christ, the forgiveness of sins, life, and strength for our daily living. Baptism really is the washing of regeneration, which liberates us from sin and death and binds us to the death and resurrection of Christ, giving us faith and life in Christ's body--the church. All this comes to us as God's free gift by the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is our life, our hope, and our salvation. This gift is ours through Christ alone, by grace alone, in faith alone.

### *Our Choice*

In the year of our Lord 2022, we face unique challenges and unique opportunities. We have a choice: we can join with other Christians who share our vision and work to bear witness to this unique evangelical catholic gift of God or we can simply surrender to the current social imaginary that binds us to decline, decay and extinction. Our call as Lutheran



Christians is to be a reform movement within the church catholic and the world and that continues into the foreseeable future.

First and foremost, we must relearn the ancient church's focus on seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the church as the body of Christ in and for the world. This is the foundation of all that we say and do in the church. We must abandon democratic majoritarianism rule by convention, the old model of governance and operation. The church is not a democracy, truth cannot be determined by a majority vote captive to expressive individualism. The world, society, government, and culture will no longer provide us with reinforcement as in the past. These structures are now opposed to all that the church stands for. In seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we must return to a robust study and commitment to the communion of saints, that is, we must look to what the Spirit of truth has said about the shape of the social imaginary of the church in scripture, confessions, and tradition. The ancient church of the first three centuries is a powerful tool in this regard. We must seek the guidance of the earliest church fathers and ordos which arose in a situation much more akin to our present situation than the works of the church in the high Middle Ages.

The issue today is not indulgences. Rather it is the rising opposition of the world to the very idea of Christianity or any religion akin to it. Our foundational commitment must be to biblical integrity and confessional fidelity. Everything we do must be informed by the biblical witness to the law/gospel word of God and must be normed in our case by Holy Scripture, our Lutheran confessional tradition, and the wider church's tradition.

For the present, the social imaginary of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church will place us outside the mainstream both in terms of practice and attitude. We need to abandon the worldly trends of "church growth movements," "entertainment evangelism," "social gospelism" and other such movements rooted in a work-righteous social imaginary. Our focus cannot be on numbers but on faithfulness and witness. We must reject a theology of glory and divine election and return to the theology of the cross.

We will not seek to build a mega-church, rather we will acknowledge ourselves to be the recipient of God's free grace, through word and sacrament called to be the body of Christ (the living presence of Christ in and for the world) and seek the company of those

who have the same commitments as our own.

We cannot be given to the latest fads in music, liturgy, and practice. We are first and foremost committed to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic faith. Our life together will be informed and shaped by that faith not by the latest perceived need of pop culture but rather in faithful participation in the *communio sanctorum*. We are not called to be entertaining or innovative; we are called to faithfulness.

Given the current culture consumerism, reflected in church shopping, (expressive individualism) most people will shop until they find the church which provides the nearest thing to an at-home feeling. This necessitates our working doubly hard to answer questions, explain our practice. We will not be able to settle for the bare minimum. Our stance will require extra effort on our part to help people become part of the family of faith which will require the reestablishment of something akin to ancient catechesis.

### *Renewal Through Theological Study*

It is important for the contemporary church to renew its commitment to theological study. It is here that I believe our Lutheran tradition could be of great help to the wider church. The dualistic nature of Lutheran theology in assertions like law and gospel, the already ready, not yet character of post-baptismal existence, the two kingdoms doctrine, faith and works, have been largely abandoned by Lutheran theology and need to be renewed in our work in LC-I to reinvigorate the Christian social imaginary and our witness to world. A thorough study of Dr. William Lazareth's last theological work THE CHRISTIAN IN SOCIETY would be an excellent place for us to begin. There is much in Lazareth's teaching in this book that could aid us in our engagement with the world lost, in the morass of expressive individualism. Our engagement in the political discussions that this movement has created should be informed by what Lutheran theology has to offer the world in these discussions.

### *Lutheran Church – International, A Model*

The LC-I has established a model in the World Parish for the scattered and disenfranchised who seek to remain in communion with the catholic faith. Work needs to be done to present and develop this model to aid the church in the coming struggles.

We must take seriously our Christian vocation to proclaim the Good News in word and deed and to help people understand and accept what it is baptism is committing them and/or their children to.

The evangelical principle suggests that the heart and life, our salvation, depends upon the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ proclaimed and received in the Word and Sacraments of Christian worship. Worship is the central activity of our Christian existence. Worship is where, through the means of grace, God in Christ forgives our sins and offers us life and salvation. Worship must have the highest priority in our commitment and our participation. Our resources of time, talent and treasure should be allocated to reflect this priority. The most important thing is for every member of the community of faith to be present for and participate in the regular Sunday Eucharist this is an act of confession that our salvation is rooted in communion with the Triune Godhead through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Through ecumenical contacts and individual parish arrangements, we must seek to aid our members to find a church home wherever that is possible.

The commitment of the LC-I to historic succession is an expression of our emphasis on the church as Evangelical and Catholic. As part of our response to those who oppose such a viewpoint, we must make it clear that the Office of the Holy Ministry is essential to the integrity of the means of grace. It is time for us to do more theological study on this issue. We must work to restore ordination in its essential nature and as a sacramental act. We must be outspoken and positive in our presentation of our position on this issue. Historic succession is an essential expression of continuity with the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic church. While it is no guarantee of truth and faithfulness, it is a powerful and norming activity that expresses in action our commitment to a central principle of faith, *lex orandi lex credendi*.

To carry forward many of these goals, we need to address the issue of stewardship. The development of mission and ministry requires that all Christians take seriously the challenge to grow in our commitment as faithful stewards. We must be sacrificial in our giving in order to provide for the needs of the church and world.

### *Renewal: Catechesis, Fellowship, Service*

To grow in our understanding of both the catholic faith and the evangelical principle we must renew our emphasis on wide-ranging programs of catechesis, Classes in Lutheran/Christian identity, Bible study, tracts, pamphlets, newsletter articles, retreats, and seminars. Every member must be encouraged to continue their growth and understanding of the faith through regular participation in some educational activity. We will be unable to proclaim the law/gospel word of God if we do not know what we believe, teach, and confess, and why we do so! We must be equipped to bear witness to the hope that is within us if we are to be effective in reaching out.

We should work to establish a fellowship, a household, a family of faith shaped by the church's social imaginary. We should strive to develop a church life that will lead the world to say once again: "see how they love one another." We cannot be the body of Christ in and for the world so long as we remain a confederation of individuals. We need to function as family, the foundational biblical view of the people of God. Hospitality must be central to our life together. Given the current collapse of family in contemporary culture this will be no easy task. We must develop an emphasis on the biblical view of family and help others to practice this way of living. The prime focus of our work should be pastoral focusing on the care and nurture of each other in the name of Christ.

We must commit ourselves to the founding of committed faith communities. This will require us to think outside the box. These congregations will likely be smaller with less use of property of the kind we know. Those of us who have retired will have to renew our commitment to serving in these situations without expectations of substantial remuneration. We must put renewed energy into finding ways to prepare pastors for these communities who will not be trained in seminaries as most will likely have other occupations to provide for their living needs.

Taking seriously Christ's actions to re-create us as his body in and for the world, we need to focus our efforts on opportunities for service, ministry, and outreach both among ourselves and the wider community. We should never forget that our evangelical calling is to proclaim the good news. What Christ has done for us, must be reflect in both word and deed.

We must do this work clearly and publicly in the name of Christ. As Luther rightly pointed out, this is the ministry of all the baptized people of God.

We must make development of relationships with other orthodox communities of faith a priority in order to give expression to the unity that is the gift of Christ through the Holy Spirit. We need not seek organic mergers but rather work together where we can to proclaim to the world the oneness that is ours in Christ.

### *Unity: Patience, Forgiveness and Maturity*

Finally, we must strive to be a household of faith which encourages diversity, creativity, and openness. We must learn that disagreements and struggle are part of Christian existence together. Debate and disagreement are in fact the fire of the Spirit at work among us. We must be patient and discerning in our deliberations. All our struggles should be informed by prayer, reflection, and study of the church's way of thinking and doing and less by our own desires and agendas. This requires patience, courage, and humility. Apart from issues of *status confessionis*, struggle and conflict should never be excuses for dividing the body, absenting ourselves or departing from the fellowship. We must mature in our faith, give and receive forgiveness, even as we receive such forgiveness from the hand of our Lord.

I believe that God--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit--will bless and prosper this work of the Gospel. Evangelical Catholic identity presents us with many challenges it is the way of the cross, it is the witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic church. I hope that the LC-I will continue to commit itself to the renewal of the church.

To the glory of God 2022

– Reverend Rodney Eberhardt

#### *A Reminder...*

*Dues in support of the mission and ministry of the Lutheran Church – International are payable at the start of each calendar year. A form for submitting your contribution is included just before this article.*

## Some Other Food for Thought

By now, the word, “quarantine” is a term that we hear daily. Almost every one has a friend, co-worker, or loved one who has had to take precautionary measures to avoid contact with those who are ill. The word “quarantine” is a word that has heightened our awareness of our health and the health of those around us.

In the past, quarantines have been linked with epidemics such as the Spanish flu, the polio epidemic of the 1950s, “Great Plague” of the Middle Ages, and the Ebola viral disease of recent times. The word “plague” is easily connected with physical diseases and their treatment. However, there is another context in which “quarantine” might be understood, and it has to do with our spiritual well-being.

The penitential season of Lent is one of the most important times of the Church Year for us. Lent lies between the joyous season of Christmas during which we celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and the “Queen of Feasts,” the Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord – Easter.

Beginning on Ash Wednesday and for the next forty days, our liturgy is centered on prayerful and penitential reflection on the bitter suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lent is a journey that is very similar to a “quarantine” because it is a spiritual journey of special devotion, self-denial, and repentance. It is a time when we try to more fully understand what our gracious and loving God has done to reconcile us to Him in spite of our sin.

Quarantining for our spiritual health calls us to be nourished on Word and Sacrament through the keeping of Lent. Medical doctors have acknowledged that patients who are spirit-filled seem to have their health restored more quickly. In cases where doctors and medical personnel have prayed with patients, some procedures have gone better than expected and hospital stays have been shorter. If we quarantine in order to maintain our physical health, we should also quarantine ourselves to maintain our spiritual health. Observing the Lenten season properly will help us do that.

Lent is not a season to celebrate; it is a season that is to be “kept.” That is, Lent is the season in which we keep the fast, keep the silence, and keep our hearts and minds on the path that leads to the restoration of our relationship with God our Father through our Lord, Jesus Christ. – Reverend Gary V. Ettlemeyer