

## **WISCONSIN FEDERATION OF LUTHERAN ALTAR GUILDS**

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### **NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2013**

#### **FROM PASTOR SCHROEDER, PASTORAL ADVISOR...**

#### **“THE LIFE OF CHRIST”**

Last summer, I wrote concerning “The Life of the Church”, which is the theme of what is often times referred to as the Non-Festival Part of the Church Year. In this season, I write some brief comments concerning “The Life of Christ”, the theme for the Festival Part of the Church Year.

The Church Year Calendar, or Liturgical Calendar is a man-made tool to help us wend through the Church Year. It has appointed seasons, colors and appointed Bible readings based on the themes of the Sundays throughout the Church Year. \*(Thius tool has been present in the church for many centuries, preceding Luther and the Reformation.

Currently we are in the Festival Part of the Church Year, which has as its general theme, “The Life of Christ”. The following seasons make up this part of the Church Year: Advent (which I wrote about last Fall), Christmas, Epiphany, Lent (which I wrote about last winter), Holy Week and Easter. Each season has its appointed colors and themes. Each has its appointed Bible Readings or Lectionary. There are hymns and prayers reflecting the various themes or seasons. Pastors have been trained concerning these things and they perhaps have passed some of this down to you in your respective Altar Guild meetings.

The Festival Part of the Church Year, as it celebrates “The Life of Christ” is a wonderful time of the church year. Afforded is the pure proclamation concerning the way of salvation found in Christ alone. Afforded is routinely redressing the Altar, as the seasons and festivals within the seasons are celebrated. Each congregation has many of it’s own traditions that augment the themes of the seasons. Sometimes this means a lot of extra work for the Guild under the direction of its pastor. Yet, this is a labor of joy as such traditions help carry the message of the Gospel – the Life of Christ – that engages the senses impressing the message upon the members of the congregation.

I might suggest that you request your pastor to come and share with you some words of instruction concerning the Church Year so that you might grow in understanding of the customs of the Church as well as the traditions of the congregation.

To God be the Glory!

**PASCHAL CANDLE**.....is the largest white candle in the worship space and is used throughout the Paschal season, which is during Easter. In some traditions it is burned until Ascension Day, in others until Pentecost. It may be carried in procession. It is placed in a special stand, traditionally to the liturgical north or left of the altar and remains there for the duration of the Easter season. It is sometimes referred to as the “Easter candle” and should not be confused with the so-called Christ candle which has no roots in liturgical history, but is often seen at the center of Advent wreaths.

The Paschal (from the Greek *Pascha* meaning “Easter”) reminds us of Christ’s victory over the darkness of sin and death. The flame of the Paschal candle symbolizes Christ as the light of the world and his presence in the midst of his people. Paschal candles display several common symbols:

1. The cross is always the central symbol, most clearly identifying it as the Paschal candle.
2. The Greek letters Alpha and Omega signify that God is the beginning and the end.
3. The current year represents God, in the present, amidst the congregation.
4. Five grains of incense (most often red) are embedded in the candle. They represent the five wounds of Jesus: one in each hand, one for each foot and the spear thrust into his side.

In some traditions the Paschal candles is extinguished at or after the reading of the Gospel on the Ascension of our Lord.

The VIGIL OF EASTER has a long and revered tradition, but is a relatively new service among Lutherans. It dates to early Jewish-Christian practices of an evening service from the Jewish feast of Passover at which a lamb is sacrificed for sin to celebrate God’s Passover rescue of his people from slavery. The term “Paschal” comes from the word *Pesach* which in Hebrew means Passover. Christians celebrate their liberation from sin’s bondage through the sacrifice of the “paschal” Lamb of God. The Saturday evening’s Vigil contains three elements; the recognition of new fire, a presentation of the paschal candle and the first expressions of Easter joy.

Historically, fires have long been a sign of God’s presence. The Old Testament is full of examples; the burning bush on Mount Sinai, the pillar of fire in the desert, the tabernacle lamps, and the sacrificial fires on the altar of the temple in Jerusalem.

Early Christians naturally viewed the kindling of new fire as a symbol of the presence of their resurrected Lord, the new pillar of fire. In Jerusalem, they blessed and lighted candles every Saturday night. By at least the fifth or sixth century, the custom had become associated with the celebrations of the Resurrection, and paschal candle had found its way into the liturgy of the Western church.

In the medieval church, allegorical meaning was ascribed to every aspect of the paschal candle. Unlighted, it represented Christ’s death and burial; lighted, it represented the splendor and glory of Christ’s resurrection. The wick represented Christ’s humanity, and the halo of the flame represented his divinity. Other candles lighted from the paschal candle symbolized Christ giving the Holy Spirit to the disciples.

After the Day of Pentecost the paschal candle can be placed near the baptismal font, is lighted at each celebration of Baptism and is a visual reminder that we are crucified and resurrected with Christ. Sometimes a small baptismal candle is lit from it to be presented to the baptized as a visual reminder of the connection between Baptism and Easter. For funerals, the paschal candle is lighted and placed at the head of the casket and visually proclaims the message of Romans 6:3-5.....”In our Baptism we have already died and been raised with Christ”

## PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, who accepted the service of faithful people during your earthly life,  
accept and bless the work of our hands in the care of your sanctuary,  
granting us a spirit of reverence for your house and worship,  
and preserving our souls and bodies as living temples of your presence,  
to whom with the Father and Holy Spirit be all honor and glory,  
now and forever.

Amen

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Don't forget to register.....EARLY!!

INVITE members of your Altar Guild to attend.

BRING examples of your banners or pictures of your banners for our picture boards.  
It's great to receive and share ideas!!

Also, any questions for our Question/Answer session, suggestions for topics for our newsletter or meetings.