

The Grace Lutheran

Newsletter of Grace LCMS – Greenwood, Arkansas

September 2026

From Pastor's Pen...

The Labor of Love

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In preparation for writing this newsletter, I did what I always do—I looked back at what I've written in the past. Given the fact that the Labor Day weekend always frontloads the month of September, it should come as no surprise that every newsletter for every September for the almost two decades I've been with you now has, without fail, focused on the concepts of "labor and rest," specifically how it's in the Divine Service that God "labors" to serve us with His Word and Sacraments while He calls us (by means of His Third Commandment) to rest; i.e., not labor, so that we can be served, refreshed, and revived. This year, however, is going to be a bit different subject matter—**loving our neighbor**. The reason for this, though, is still going to revolve around the very good and Godly aspects of rest and work/labor. So... I'm not going totally different; I'm just taking a different route to get to the same endpoint.

For those unaware, our Sunday morning study has been examining St. Peter's first epistle. (It's a wonderful letter, and very timely for the world we find ourselves in today. If you're not already joining us in study, you should!) I digress. It was during the course of this study a couple of Sundays ago that we were brought face-to-face with Peter's admonition to "*love one another earnestly from a pure heart*" (1 Pet 1:22). The common understanding of "loving earnestly" comes down to something akin to "loving sincerely." While our love for one another should certainly be sincere, this

is NOT what St. Peter is saying here! The word the Holy Spirit uses here in the original Greek is *ektenos*, which is better translated as "strenuously." ***Strenuous? This implies labor/hard work! Love is supposed to come easy!***

St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13 what true/sincere love is: "*Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.*" I don't know about you, but reading over this list leaves me feeling a bit unsettled. Love is patient... always? Love is not envious or rude... all the time? Love does not insist on its own way? It's not irritable or resentful? If this were baseball, I would've run out of strikes a long time ago!

You have to admit: Loving anyone with this kind of love is difficult. It takes some work. Add to this the fact that we are to love *everyone* with this kind of love, and the honest ones will confess that it's all but impossible. "Strenuous" doesn't even come close to describing the labor that is true Christian love.

But maybe we're coming at this from the wrong direction. The Greek word St. Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 13 is *agape*. It's also the same word St. Peter uses; i.e., we are to *agape* one another strenuously. This is important. It's not *philos*, which is the love we show to friends. It's not *eros*, which is the more physical/emotional kind of love two people may have for each other. (And let's be honest: Oftentimes the physical/emotional "pitter-patter of the heart" that people feel isn't really love, but hormones.) *Agape* love is different. This is a godly kind of love. It's the same kind of love that God has for us in Christ (ref. John 3:16). In fact, you could rightly take the word "love" in 1 Corinthians 13, and substitute it with the word "Jesus," and this would give you a good understanding of *agape* love. This is the love that with which our Lord loves us. Ask yourself: Are

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you always easy to love? Do you make it easy for the Lord to always love you? And yet... He does, without fail, without condition!

Look: I don't deny the fact that showing forth love can, at times, be "laborious." There are times you really have to work at it. Sometimes, as some in the Sunday study noted, it's easier to show love to complete strangers than it is to love family. After all, you don't know strangers. On the other hand, you know the family member. You know their "skeletons." You know their history. Past behaviors are excellent indicators for future behaviors. It can be difficult to "love past all that." If you kick a dog enough times, it will stop coming around you. No one should be surprised by the high divorce rates in our culture today. People don't want to put in the work, and marriage (at times) takes work, and if *both* parties aren't willing to put in the work, the marriage will fail. The same goes for all relationships, really; family, friends, coworkers, etc. Loving others is strenuous. But we do it! No matter how strenuous or tough it may be, we do it. *"We love because He first loved us."*

This is why I said earlier that maybe we were coming at this from the wrong direction. Our love proceeds forth from Christ and His love for us. *"Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matt 11:28). St. Augustine is renowned for observing, *"the hearts of men will not rest until they rest in Thee, O Lord."* How very true! Is being faithful "laborious?" Can it be a rather strenuous endeavor to remain faithful, especially when one considers the fact that faithfulness to our Lord necessarily includes loving our neighbors? Absolutely! But... the more we tend to "labor" in walking the walk of baptismal faith, loving as we've been loved; the more we tend to "labor" in holding fast to Christ and His love for us, putting Him first in all our priorities, cares, and concerns, the more we will find the rest and peace that surpasses all human understanding; the rest and peace that is known and understood only in Jesus Christ.

Pastor Zirbel

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LIFE in CHRIST

Pastor Zirbel's **Wednesday Bible Study** continues with a study of Eastern Orthodoxy. All are encouraged to attend the study that begins at 10:00 am.

Church Directory has been updated and distributed in your mail boxes. If there are errors or updates are needed, please let Deaconess Connie know. Thank you.



As noted in the August Newsletter, our new **LWML** year will kick off on Tuesday, September 1 at the church at 12:30 pm. Bring your own sack lunch and dessert will be provided. We will be fine-tuning our planning for the upcoming year. We would be thrilled to see new faces – Having projects & fellowship with others is a wonderful thing! Input from all ladies would be so welcome – Please join us!

September Birthdays

2	Jo Martin
5	Patt Conaway
9	Mike Bass
11	Helen Hirsch
17	Glen Fleer
28	Tristan Gieschen



September Anniversaries

8	Joe & Jeanne Henderson
19	Mike & Judy Bass
25	Richard & Tiffany Willadsen
29	Michael & Delsey Guse

*I give You thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing Your praise;
I bow down toward Your holy temple and give thanks
to Your name for Your steadfast love and
Your faithfulness, for You have exalted above all things
Your name and Your Word.*

Psalms 138:1-2

Remembering in Prayer:

Let my prayer be counted as incense before You, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice! Psalm 141:2

For the sick—Father of mercies and God of all comfort, our only help in time of need, look with favor upon those who suffer illness and infirmity. Assure them of Your mercy, deliver them from the temptations of the evil one, and give them patience and comfort in their illness. If it please You, restore them to health, or give them grace to accept this tribulation with courage and hope.

For those who grieve—Heavenly Father, into whose keeping we entrust our loved ones, help us to look to You in our time of sorrow, remembering the cloud of faithful witnesses with which we are surrounded, Grant that we may one day share in the joys of those who now rest in Your presence.

For the joy of the resurrection among us; for the fruit of faith nourished by the Word and the Sacraments.

For faith to live in the promises of Holy Baptism; for one's calling and daily work; for the unemployed; for the salvation and well-being of our neighbors; for schools, colleges, and seminaries; for good government and for peace.

For those outside the Church that all would repent and live. Merciful God, take away their iniquity, and turn them from their false gods to You, the living true God. Gather them into Your holy Church to the Glory of Your name, through Jesus Christ.

Let us bless the Lord. Thanks be to God!

Celebration Banquet

Giving Thanks

For 60 Years of Mid-South District Ministry!

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

5:45 - 8:00 PM – First Lutheran Church

1115 North D Street / Fort Smith, AR 72901

The Mid-South District of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod is blessed to celebrate 60 years of ministry this year! To mark this blessed milestone, the Mid-South District will host Celebration Banquets this fall, in partnership with congregations across the District.

*The banquet happening in our area will be an opportunity for us to gather as a faith family, give thanks for 60 years of ministry together, and prayerfully support the mission of our Mid-South District! There is **no cost** to attend this event, which will include:*

- *Hors d'oeuvres & Fellowship Time*
- *An Elegant Dinner*
- *District Greetings and Updates on the "Blueprint for Ministry"*
- *Inspiring Local Ministry Impact Stories*
- *An Opportunity to Share Financial Support for District Ministry*
- *A Keepsake to commemorate the District's 60th Anniversary*

Please Join Us!

Sign the RSVP sheet in the Narthex

Available in the Grace Library

5 Things You Can Do To Witness Christ – John Wollenburg Sias (CPH, 2013)

Number 1: *Witness Christ Where He Speaks and Works*

"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty." (2 Peter 1:6)

- The Apostles Witnessed Jesus
- Jesus is Not Gone but is Alive and With Us
- You Witness Jesus Where He Comes to You
- For the sake of ourselves and those whom we might witness, we should appreciate the Divine Service as the place where faith receives the gifts of Christ necessary for our witness

Want to read more? Borrow the Book!



Grace Lutheran Church
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Greenwood, AR 72936

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Worship & Bible Study Opportunities:

Sunday Worship 8:00 & 10:15 AM

Sunday Adult Bible Study & Sunday School 9:00 AM

Wednesday Adult Bible Study 10:00 AM