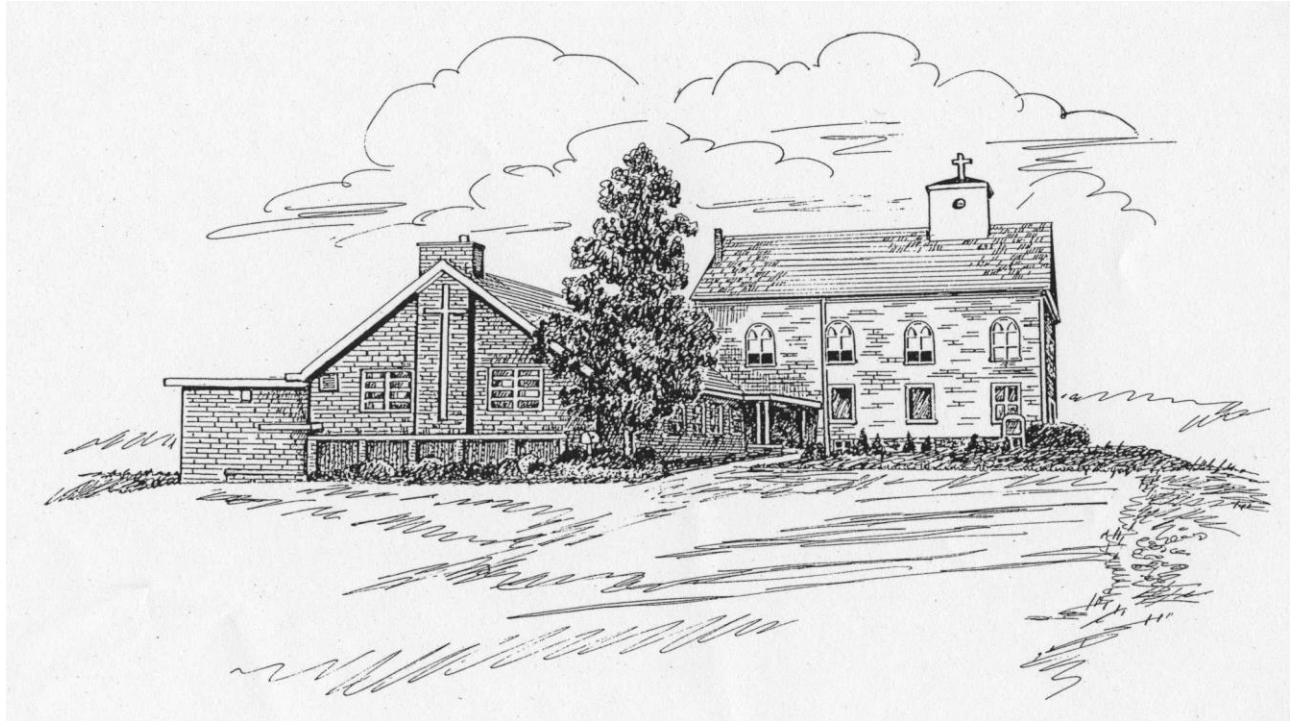


WISPS OF STRAW



St. James Lutheran Church Newsletter

May 2017

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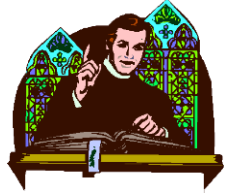
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*“Serving Christ in Word and Deed”
more than 265 Years*

Pastor's Letter

Religion is...God is...

In 1844 philosopher and economist Karl Marx wrote: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people." What he meant by this was that while religion, like pain medications, is able to temporarily provide relief from suffering, it also, like narcotics, induces illusions of reality and saps the energy required for confronting the actual cause of the pain. This thought was not original to Marx, Novalis (the pen name of Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg) wrote very similar words in 1798.



In 1882, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, wrote the words: "God is dead" in his collection entitled *The Joyful Pursuit of Knowledge and Understanding*. (The phrase became much more popular with the publication of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.) Nietzsche and others argued that if you remove the belief in God from Christianity, there is no basis for Christian morals, and that means there can be no absolute values. No "right" or "wrong" which can be universally applied.

In 1961, Gianni Vahanian's *The Death of God* was published. Vahanian argued that modern secular culture had lost all sense of the sacred, lacking any sacramental meaning, no transcendental purpose or sense of providence. He concluded that for the modern mind "God is dead". Vahanian's envisioned a transformed post-Christian and post-modern culture which would create a different experience of the divine. Then, on April 8, 1968, Time magazine's cover article was: *Is God Dead?* And thus (intentionally or not) made popular Nietzsche's concept of the "übermensch": the modern man determining "right" and "wrong" for himself (or herself) separated from the teaching of any religion. I decide what is right for me; you decide what is right for you; I won't push my beliefs on you, you don't push your beliefs on me. That was the concept anyway. In fact, many anti-Christian philosophies have been pushed on us.

Just about that time, we began to believe all kinds of things. We began to believe in "free-love." We began to believe that we could do whatever we wanted without consequence. We began to believe that religion was about someone else controlling us. We began to believe we could be "spiritual" without being fettered by mundane and outdated practices like worship, Bible study and prayer. We began to believe that the goal of life was to become the *übermensch* (or I suppose, the *überfrau?*). We began to believe that we could live our lives according to our own personal values and fill our lives with the activities we found enjoyable. We came to believe in *ourselves*, in the worst sense of that phrase. We looked to sports, entertainment, wealth, or "success" to fill that God-shaped hole in all our hearts. We turned to alcohol, drugs, relationships, or shopping to ease the pain, even if just for a little while.

And now many of us lament about how our society is going to hell in a handbasket. We see the decay of society, the glorification of the flesh, the idolization of entertainment and, perhaps not surprisingly, the dramatic increase in divorce, suicide, anxiety, conflict, the distrust of institutions and isolation from others. I was struck recently with a certain irony: Italy restaurant on Roseberry Street is going to be torn down and a bank was going up; Rite Aid and CVS stores are popping up left and right and a new Shammy Shine car wash is going in on Roseberry Street south of Memorial Highway. And yet, churches struggle to stay alive. Isn't it interesting that we are building banks (to protect our wealth) and drugstores (to treat our ills) and car washes to enhance our status symbols, and all the while we become more anxious about money, health and status?

So how is this "religion is the opiate of the masses"/"God is dead"/ *übermensch* way-of-life working out for us? I wish I had a solution. I wish I could change society. I wish the world could see what I know: *It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man* (Psalm 118:8). I wish I could help the world to see that all those things that we try to cram into the God-shaped hole in our heart only cause more heartache. But all I can do to change society is to change me: I can continue to worship and praise God. I can continue to seek not only God's grace but his judgment and guidance as well. I can keep up with those mundane, "old-school" practices of my religion so that praying prayers and singing hymns, and reading the Bible will change *me*. And maybe, just maybe, by living my life in such a way, my life can become attractive to others. Others might look at my life and say, "I want the peace and joy that he has." And maybe you can do the same thing, too.

"as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." -Joshua 24:15

Pr. Kelly

Pentecost Beauty!

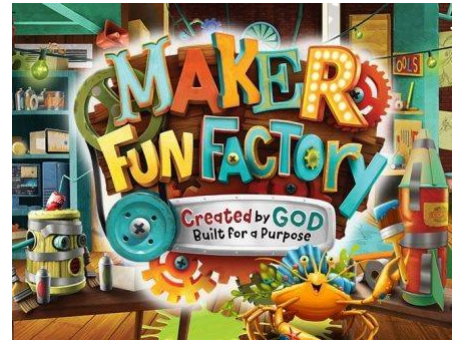


Pentecost will be June 4! We will celebrate not only the "birthday of the Church of Jesus Christ" with the coming of the Holy Spirit, but also the Affirmation of Baptism by four of our young people. We have the opportunity to beautify the sanctuary with red geraniums. We will be ordering them shortly so please sign-up in either the lobby or the narthex. Each 6" pot is \$6.00. See Karen Kelly if you have any questions.

**“STRAW CHURCH: PRIDE IN OUR PAST, STRENGTH IN OUR PRESENT,
LAYING A FOUNDATION FOR OUR FUTURE”**

VBS Time is Approaching!

If spring is here, can summer be far behind? Our hard-working Sunday School and VBS staff think not, and plans are well under way for another successful Vacation Bible School, again to be held jointly with Grace Lutheran. The theme this year is "Maker Fun Factory", and the dates are Monday, July 17th through Friday the 21st, from 9:00 am to 12:00 noon at St. James. We hope to once again make it free to all participants. To that end we will have a VBS fundraiser at Panera Bread (Rte. 22 by the Phillipsburg Mall) on May 31st from 4:00 to 8:00 pm.



As in the past, Panera Bread will donate a percentage of purchases made by participating customers to our VBS. **The only rule is that each purchaser MUST present the official flyer, either in paper copy or on a Smart Device.** The percentage donated will be on a sliding scale, so the more people we have taking part, and the more flyers presented, the more money we will get. Therefore, if it is not too inconvenient, we will be better off if each member of a party has a separate flyer and orders on a separate check. We also encourage everyone to give flyers (and this information) to friends and family members in the area.

A downloadable and printable copy (PDF) of the flyer is included as a separate attachment with each e-mailed newsletter, and a paper copy containing two flyers will be added to each printed one. We are not allowed to distribute flyers on-site at the time of the fundraiser, but extra copies will be available at the church.

Straw Church Tour - Saturday, May 20th

A tour is scheduled to the Bread Lock Museum and Park. The site is at 2627 Rte. 57 East (behind OK 4 Wheel Drive) in Stewartsville.

It is located on Lock #7 West of the Morris Canal, which operated from 1831 to 1924 between Jersey City and Phillipsburg. Plenty of history here beginning with "what has this to do with bread?" Aside from the canal information, there is much more local history to be found in this museum.

There will be a light lunch (hoagies and drinks provided or bring your own) from 11:30 to 12:00 noon at the picnic area. **Tours begin at 12:00 noon.**

Brochures and a sign-up sheet are in the Frey Hall lobby. For questions or more information see or call Charlotte or Dave Morris at 908-859-0723.

Just for chuckles, an actual church bulletin announcement:

Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our church and community.

Lutheran World Federation Assembly



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Presiding Bishop [Elizabeth A. Eaton](#) and a delegation from the ELCA have joined Lutherans from around the globe for the [12th Assembly](#) of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) meeting in Windhoek, Namibia, May 10-16. Gathering under the theme "Liberated by God's Grace," the assembly brings together almost 800 participants, including 324 delegates. There are seven voting delegates from the ELCA.

The LWF is a global communion of 145 churches representing more than 74 million Christians in 98 countries. The ELCA is the communion's only member church from the United States.

"The ELCA is one of 145 churches in the Lutheran family around the world. We can see ourselves as part of this global family and that together we can do more," said Eaton. "This work includes supporting refugee camps for people in Jordan and Kenya and building up churches' capacities around the world. The Lutheran World Federation also helps us. We have a ministry in Detroit called *Grace in Action*, and the entire federation is supporting that ministry. This is how we are church together. Our work with The Lutheran World Federation also enhances our ecumenical and inter-religious engagement and witness."



The assembly is the highest LWF decision-making body and meets every six to seven years. During this gathering, the assembly will speak out on issues concerning the life and witness of the churches and the world. The assembly will also elect the LWF president and council to serve until the next assembly. The current LWF president, the Rev. Munib A. Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, was elected in 2010 and is concluding his term.

The gathering is hosted by the three Namibian member churches of the LWF - the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia-German Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The Rev. Lydia Posselt, pastor of Family of God Lutheran Church in Buckingham, Pa., was chosen to preach at the closing worship on May 16. Posselt is the winner of an international preaching contest hosted by the LWF, which invited young pastors from LWF member churches to submit sermons to be considered for the closing worship. The idea was generated from the fact that Martin Luther was 33 years old when he sparked the Reformation in 1517.

A highlight of the Assembly will be the global commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation on Sunday, May 14, at the Sam Nujoma Stadium. Assembly delegates along with members of the Lutheran churches in Namibia and ecumenical guests will attend the event.

What Fun! Fourteen people from St. James and Grace enjoyed a wonderful concert by the Lehigh Valley Harmonizers May 5th. Some of us gathered for dinner at Mariana's in Phillipsburg and then went over to the concert. We laughed, and sang along, and just had a great time. Thanks to everyone who participated. We are hoping to do more mutual events. St. James is hosting a BINGO night on May 13th and Grace is doing another dinner and movie (Manchester by the Sea) on May 20th. We are looking into a trip to an Iron Pigs baseball game soon. So stay tuned, keep your eyes open and your ears perked for announcements of upcoming events!

Karen Kelly

Two additional photos below are of the Catechism class picnic and our Sanctuary on Easter. Many thanks to Pastor and Karen for the lovely floral arrangement on the paschal candle.

