

The Witness

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20 ESV

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February 2022

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Volume 7 No. 2

'For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.' – 1 Corinthians 1:18

Dear Brothers and sisters in Christ, I would like to register a complaint! No, don't worry; this complaint is not against any of you. In fact, I have long had this complaint and have yet to register it because I do not know for certain where to begin. Perhaps, once I've shared it with you, you might know someone I should talk to about this!

I suppose I should begin by admitting that there are a lot of things that I see in this world that trouble me as a Christian and as a Pastor. Hearing people scorn God is a troubling thing. Seeing people deride His church is also a troubling thing. The most troubling thing to me, though, is the variety of caricatures of the Christian faith that exist in society and circulate as if they were facts. I believe that the caricatures people have of the Christian church are a major stumbling block to them even entertaining the idea of attending a church service.

The most glaring of these caricatures, I believe, is that of what makes up the substance of the Christian faith. Too often in newspapers, on television, or even in conversation with strangers, the understanding of the Christian faith presented is more of a behavioral code enforced by a strictly demanding God than it is the connection to the God who made us, died for us, and loves us. Have you seen it too? Does it bother you as well?

That popular notion of what it means to be a Christian is quite unlike what we receive and experience in our church. The caricature associates the feelings of deep guilt with being a Christian, but we know that this is not so! Indeed, we confess our sins, and surely, we are contrite for them and acknowledge before God that we are sinful, but we also receive the forgiveness of those sins every Sunday in the absolution. More than that, we live in the freedom of experiencing forgiveness that is not merely a spoken phrase, but that is established by Jesus' death on the cross and delivered to each of us in baptism. We have the comfort that God still speaks to us in his Word and feeds us in Holy Communion. We believe that heaven is not simply the afterlife alternative for straight-laced people, and likewise hell is not the place for those who like to live life a little looser – these caricatures may seem comical to us, and in some cases they may have begun as a joke, but the sad fact is that when enough people hear the same thing enough times, some believe it. It is no laughing matter when someone says they would rather spend eternity in hell because they believe it will be more fun, or because it will be populated with more of their friends. It is, truly, a matter of life and death.

I do not like it (nor do I understand it), but I can accept it when someone who understands the substance of the Christian faith rejects it. I am deeply troubled, however, when the rationale for unbelief is based upon a caricature of what we believe. As St. Paul said, the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. This Christian faith to which we hold is the difference, for us, between eternal life and death. Nothing matters more.

So, there you have my complaint. Perhaps you know someone to whom it could be addressed. Better yet, perhaps you know someone who knows Christ and his church only through a caricature. Don't tell them my complaint. Instead, tell them what you believe. If you're not sure how to do that, or if you don't want to do that on your own, invite them to church.

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This month we remember a very important early church father, St. Polycarp of Smyrna, Bishop and Martyr. Born c. 69, Polycarp was a central figure in the early church. A disciple of the evangelist John, he linked the first generation of believers to later Christians. After serving for many years as bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp was arrested, tried, and executed for his faith on February 23, c. 156. An eyewitness narrative of his death, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, continues to encourage believers in times of persecution.

Some wonderful words from this first and second century Bishop: "Faith is the mother of us all; with Hope following in her train and Love of God and Christ and neighbor leading the way. Let a man's mind be wholly bent on these, and he has fulfilled all the demands of holiness; for to possess Love is to be beyond the reach of sin."

"To deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is to be Antichrist. To contradict the evidence of the Cross is to be of the devil. And to pervert the Lord's words to suit our own wishes, by asserting that there is no such things as resurrection or judgment, is to be the first-begotten son of Satan. So let us have no more of this nonsense from the gutter, and these lying doctrines, and turn back to the Word originally delivered to us."

Almighty God, who didst give Thy servant Polycarp boldness to confess the Name of our Savior Jesus Christ before the rulers of this world, and courage to die for this faith: Grant that we likewise may ever be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us, and to suffer gladly for His sake; through the same, Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In Christ,
Pastor Matthew Uttenreither



Lutheran Women's Missionary League

Lutheran Women
In Mission

Where Mites Go

Hope of Christ for Cancer Patients

Grant: \$70,000

As Christians, we are charged with sharing the message of the Gospel and the Word with all individuals. The mission of Phil's Friends, an LCMS Recognized Service Organization, is to introduce and strengthen relationships with Christ by providing faith-based hope to those with cancer. The support includes a care package with practical, emotional, and spiritual items, including a Bible, a card sent monthly for 12 months, and a new program "Hope on Call," in which Phil's Friends' trained volunteers meet virtually with the cancer patient to talk and pray. This grant would further fund Phil's Friends Cancer Care Packages, Cards of Hope, and Hope on Call.

Testimonies from Around the World

Mozambique

Glory be to God who sees our needs and on time supplies them. Thank you very much brother. Know that your work is blessing many brothers and sisters here in Mozambique. These books are a big help. I am a preacher and teacher and as you may know there is very little information — reading resources — available in my country. With these books my teaching and preaching is improving very much. I have showed these books to other pastors and will let them use them. They express their appreciation too.

Maybe you will not understand my African way of saying appreciation for the books you sent, but I want you to know I thank you very much.



We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves us is never alone. That is because faith is a living, busy, and active thing. It inhales all of God's riches in Christ and exhales this in love and service to the neighbor.

But who is my neighbor? God in His mercy has placed us into three distinct communities: society,

family, and the church. That means we have a duty to those around us in each of these communities. We pray for the people in these three communities daily. We rejoice with them in times of joy and suffer with them in times of sadness. And we give to them from the income that God provides as we are able and as they have need.

So we pay taxes to our governments so that they may do the work that is needed for our neighbors in society. We give to our families so that they have food and clothing, house and home, even educations. And we give to our church—our local congregations—so that the gospel may be preached and the sacraments administered for us and others.

The beauty of this is that God smiles upon all that giving. When you pay your taxes, God is pleased that you have served your neighbor who needs what the government provides. When you provide for your family, God is pleased. That you have helped your neighbor with the necessities of life by sharing with them what He has given to you, God is pleased. And when you give to your local congregation to support the ongoing preaching of the gospel, God is pleased. To all this giving, He says to you, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Looking at giving in this light makes it a joy to give. The joy is multiplied. There is joy in you because you have served your neighbor in his need. There is joy in your neighbor for God has answered their prayers through you. And God rejoices and is pleased with it all. It might just make the humdrum of grocery shopping and mortgage payments a bit more joyous. It might even make April 15 tolerable (St. Paul had to have this pep talk with the Romans, also, "This is why you pay taxes...." Rom. 13:6). And it surely will make the envelope placed into the offering plate a joyful thing.

Indeed God is pleased with you. You are saved by faith alone because of Jesus Christ. And that saving faith is never alone. It is busy and active. It serves the neighbor in society, family, and church with free and cheerful giving.

LCMS Stewardship Ministry



Joy is a term that appears many times in many translations of the Bible; but what does joy really mean? In the *Winter 2022* issue of the Ministry Update, we bring to light the joy we see as members of the LCMS Northern Illinois District.

Joy is a state of being, which differs from happiness. Joy is lasting. Happiness may come and go. The teaching of Luther and the reformers can be summarized in three phrases: Grace alone, Faith alone, Scripture alone. We find joy in these three phrases! The Holy Spirit has given us full and abiding joy. We have joy because of the grace of Jesus Christ that lives in us. God is always near. We can joyfully focus on our Savior and who He is in our life. We can hold onto joy, we can feel joyful, and we can rejoice with praise no matter what our circumstances may be and no matter what is going on in our lives. And, no matter how down we are, there is always joy to be found in the Lord, and Scripture is filled with examples of joy.

So, let us go forward with Joy! We asked Congregational Chairpersons from around the District to share with us the Joy! they have in serving their congregations. You will find their responses as diverse as their ministries:

At Immanuel Crystal Lake, being chairman is both a humbling and joyful experience. As chairman, I am more aware of how our members utilize their God-given talents across our ministries. It is a pleasure to watch our members develop a stronger bond with Christ and each other. In addition, it's an honor to partner with the other board members. They have been amazing Christian examples and regularly are joy-filled examples. It is also a privilege to work with Pastor Larry Tieman. Pastor Tieman humbly focuses on sharing the Gospel and models Christian behavior.

*Nick Gottschalk,
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Crystal Lake*

Time & Talent

Deacons

February 6	Tom Friedewald
February 13	Jim Jenne
February 20	Jonathan Schultz
February 27	Tom Friedewald

Greeters

February 6	Judy Darville Rosalie Streng
February 13	Pam Hrajnoha Lois Marten
February 20	Gail Bujnowski Judy Darville
February 27	Pam Hrajnoha Lois Marten

Altar Guild

February	Kim Giannopoulos Pam Hrajnoha
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Congratulations Hannah!
Confirmed of January 9, 2022



We congratulate the following members of Ascension as they celebrate their **birthdays** in February.

- | | |
|-------------|------------------|
| February 14 | Monty Gabor |
| February 16 | Heather Aragosa |
| February 23 | Sandy Friedewald |
| February 29 | Collin Duszak |



We also congratulate the following couples as they celebrate their **wedding anniversaries** in February.

- | | |
|-------------|------------------------------|
| February 21 | Rev. Stanley & Pat Zyskowski |
|-------------|------------------------------|

These are the **birthdays** and **wedding anniversaries** recorded in our church records for the coming month. If any birthday or anniversary was omitted, please notify the church office.

* * *

God's Valentine Gift

God's Valentine gift of love to us
Was not a bunch of flowers;
It wasn't candy, or a book
To while away the hours.

His gift was to become a man,
So He could freely give
His sacrificial love for us,
So you and I could live.

He gave us sweet salvation, and
Instruction, good and true--
To love our friends and enemies
And love our Savior, too.

So as we give our Valentines,
Let's thank our Lord and King;
The reason we have love to give
Is that He gave everything.

By Joanna Fuchs



The Board of Christian Ministries continues to collect food donations **every Sunday** for local food pantries. Many people in our community depend upon these pantries to feed their families during this continuing pandemic. Any canned or packaged items of your choice would be appreciated.

2022 ASCENSION COUNCIL BOARD MEMBERS

President:	Tom Friedewald
Vice President:	Jim Jenne
Treasurer:	Sandy Friedewald
Secretary:	Audrey Schultz
Financial Secretary:	Carolyn Jannusch
Board of Deacons:	Jim Jenne (Chair) Hal Downs (Emeritus) Tom Friedewald Jim Jenne Jonathan Schultz
Board of Christian Ministries	Lois Marten (Chair)
Board of Trustees:	Jason Romano (Chair)
Board of Youth:	Sarah Lindahl (Chair)

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OFFICIAL ACTS

Rite of Confirmation
Hannah E. Uttenreither
January 9, 2022

Do you have an announcement to share about your family such as a birth, death, engagement, graduation, etc., **let us know! We'd love to hear from you!**

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