

ST. PETER COMMUNICATOR

43 N 3rd St., Hilbert, WI 54129

Office: (920) 853-3217

December 2024

From the desk of Pastor Peterson

Grace, mercy, and God's peace to each of you this Christmas season from our risen, victorious, and ascended Lord Jesus Christ, Amen. My how time flies. I remember my dad telling me that as I got older time would seem to go faster, and he was right. This will be my fourth Christmas as your pastor, and I am grateful to the Lord and to all of you for allowing me to serve with you all.

I am looking forward to celebrating Christmas Eve and Christmas Day with all of you. Then, Kali and I will be leaving for a week to celebrate Christmas with my own family in Iowa. I would ask for your prayers as I journey back to Iowa and return to my home here in Wisconsin after the 1st of the year. You all will be in my prayers as well so that you will have a joyous and blessed Christmas.

When I was working as a hospice chaplain, I would tell my patients and their families to enjoy themselves with each other and make memories. That way when their loved one passes away, they would have fond memories, and those memories will help with the healing that they will go through. So, I would encourage each of you to make memories with your family and friends and enjoy your Christmas season.

Of course, one of the events that we look forward to is opening the presents and seeing what we get. It is a blessing to be united with our family and friends this Holiday Season. Yet these blessings pale in comparison to what God has in store for us. Here what God says:

Philippians 4:19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Malachi 3:10 "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

2 Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, enjoy your Christmas and holiday season, make great memories, and rejoice that we have been given the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ. Amen

2 Corinthians 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Have a blessed Christmas Season and remember that God really, really, really does love you!!!

In His Grip,



Pastor Peterson



LUTHERAN WOMEN IN MISSION

Christmas Brunch: Plans are being finalized for our Christmas brunch scheduled for December 8 right after our Worship Service. This is for all members of the congregation and their guests, and so a sign-up sheet is provided so that we can assure we have adequate seating, place settings and beverages available. There will be music, games, gifts and plenty of fellowship. Please sign up to attend, and if you are able, we would also appreciate a food item for the pot-luck breakfast/brunch. This is always lots of fun, and we hope you can join us. Sign up and bring your friends and family.

Nativity Scene: Please take a look at the fabulous hand carved Nativity set in the Narthex. This wonderful decoration has been donated with proceeds to go to missions. We are using the process of a silent auction for bidding on this amazing item, so add your name (or phone number) with your bid to claim ownership! Bidding will continue until our Christmas brunch, and the new owner will be announced during that event. How exciting! If you are outbid, just add another bid at the bottom of the list. You can bid as many times as you wish to be the new owner. What an outstanding display or gift for your Christmas witness.

Gifts From the Heart

Free At Last Ministry: Our Gifts From the Heart for the Free at Last Ministry in Milwaukee were delivered during November. All donations were gladly received and sincere thanks were offered by Deacon Patrick and several of the Free at Last participants. They were especially pleased to receive the backpacks, and a black winter jacket was quickly claimed by one of the attendees who helped us unload our car. Our thanks to Joanne Hernke for purchasing the backpacks with her

Thrivent Action card and our thanks to Thrivent for assisting with our mission projects.

Souper Bowl Sunday Gifts for the Bread of Life Food Pantry: At the first of the new year we will start our ingathering for the Bread of Life Food Pantry in Chilton. This pantry serves many families throughout Calumet County. As we have learned in years past, the pantry shelves are bare after the holidays, and our gifts are warmly received by the managers of Bread of Life. Our ingathering will continue until Super Bowl Sunday, and we continue to refer to it as our “Souper Bowl” event. What a blessing it is to be able to assist those among us who struggle to meet their daily needs. Watch for the list of items most urgently needed.

WIM (Women in Mission) will resume their regular meeting schedule in January on the second Tuesday of each month. All women of the congregation are members, and we know you would love our Bible studies and that you would like to give your input for our planning for the upcoming year. Plan to join us! It’s exciting to get new members with new ideas.



MISSION
MATTERS

L.A.M.P.: A cross-cultural ministry sharing Jesus Christ with God’s people in remote areas of Canada.

For the last 55 years, L.A.M.P., Lutheran Association of Missionaries and Pilots, Inc. (Canada) and Lamp Ministry Inc. (United States) has shared the Word of God with the people of Northern Canada. LAMP’s volunteers and staff from Canada and the United States share the love of Jesus to Indigenous people in communities in remote northern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia through Christ-centered Bible studies and other outreach projects.

LAMP's outreach programs include:

- Leading Vacation Bible Schools and Christ-centered sports camps to children and youth and offering Bible study programs for adults during the summer months
- Providing continuing ministry through technology such as Facebook, Skype and email
- Visiting various communities throughout the year as time, resources and weather allows
- Providing special events such as women's retreats
- Praying regularly for the Indigenous people in general and for specific needs as they become known

Opportunities to participate in this ministry include prayer, donations and mission trips. For more information, see www.lampministry.org or call 1-800-307-4036.



December

- 1 Susan Reeve
- 2 Abby Marose
- 3 Pastor Peterson
- 5 Elena Weyenberg
- 6 Doug Koffarnus
Coreen Behnke
- 7 Wally Jentsch
Tom Kamps
- 10 Michael Hostettler
Bekah Bergelin
- 11 Lori Ott
- 12 Debbie Manders
- 13 Dean Bergelin
- 15 Sue Plate
- 17 Germaine Zahn
- 23 Ben Marose
Blaine Schmitting
- 31 Shelly Jost



'Love One Another': The Best Evangelism Strategy

By Lyman Stone



As a demographer who studies religious communities, I get one question more than any other: How can churches grow? Despite the many problems surrounding a focus on “church growth” as a goal, I take the question with the earnestness with which it is usually asked. It is a tragedy to see faithful churches close, to see the clear numeric dwindling of Christ’s people in the United States today. While simply getting high numbers to report isn’t the goal of evangelism, there is a very real and faithful sense

in which Christians genuinely desire that their congregations should be full of neighbors coming to receive the words which have eternal life.

My answer to the question is equally in earnest: Invite people to church. Across [decades of scholarship](#), it really is the case that [there are more converts](#) in churches where more members invite others to church on Sunday or to other church activities. This isn't rocket science: When the seed of the Gospel is sown in the ears of its hearers, it may sometimes fall on stony soil, but often enough it falls in good soil (Matt. 13:8–9). Scripture tells us clearly that “only God ... gives the growth” (1 Cor. 3:7). But it also tells us that those who proclaim the Gospel are “servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned. ... For we are God’s fellow workers” (1 Cor. 3:5). The Holy Spirit gives the growth, and He uses His people as He does so. In congregations with more members who act as willing instruments of the Spirit’s work, calling people into the body of Christ, it so happens that there tends to be somewhat more positive numeric change. But as every church worker knows, this answer, while serious, raises more questions than it answers. “Just triple the number of people you invite to church” turns out not to be highly practicable. Sure, you can knock on doors or make cold calls, but those kinds of invitations without relational context turn out to be, while not wholly ineffective, extremely labor- and time-intensive, and thus daunting for clergy or active laymembers with limited time and many other duties. Plus, again, evangelism isn’t just a “numbers game:” inviting more people to church by devaluing the personal care contained in each invitation isn’t a good idea. Setting aside the spiritual question at the root of it, on some level the fundamental social problem of evangelism is just this: **How do we create circumstances where more church members feel empowered to talk to their friends about faith and, especially, about checking out their church?**

A culture starved for community

Modern life is full of talk about “communities.” Anything can be a community — races or ethnic groups are describes as “communities,” an online chat group is a “community,” the new megachurch down the road probably talks a lot about being a “community,” and in Google’s digital library of most

English-language texts from all of history, usage of the word “community” rose 30% between 1985 and 2020. And yet, at the same time, real community life has largely withered away: Membership in almost every kind of American civic life [has declined sharply over the last few decades](#). Even informally, Americans spend about 40% less time with friends in a typical week now than they did 50 years ago. Social media has exacerbated this trend, but it didn’t begin it. Even as Americans have become more and more rhetorically fixated on “community,” their actual communities have been ground down by the onslaught of individualism, television, the all-consuming cradle-to-grave American sports culture (whether dominating our homes on TV, or our schedules for our kids’ travel teams), social media, and any number of other forces of atomizing modernity.

Churches are no exception to this trend. Truthfully, the decline of religion in America is to a considerable extent just a downstream effect of the wider decline in *all* community life in America. The soil of American society today is just stonier than in the past, not least because a growing number of Americans live isolated lives giving them few of the relationships and connections through which they might otherwise have been invited to a Bible study, a fellowship event, or to the Divine Service. As I’ll describe below, the average LCMS member will extend approximately 1.1 church invitations to a non-member per year: but those invitations will mostly go out to LCMS members’ social contacts. Huge chunks of modern American society have few or no social contacts at all; figuring out how to “invite” them is no simple task. At about 1 church invitation per LCMS member per year, we also have to ask: What share of our members’ relational contacts never in their lives got an invite? How many people lived lives of quiet spiritual suffering while their LCMS neighbor couldn’t quite figure out the right way to invite them to church? I do not ask this to be down on our church members — we are all limited people, and inviting people to church can indeed be socially fraught.

The key point, however, is just this: Modern Americans are starved for community. They talk about community all the time, but live lives of isolation and loneliness. Once you realize that American life has been fundamentally transformed

in this particular way, namely, that most people today simply do not have many meaningful interactions with others, have few close friends, and have almost no actual personal experience of functional community life, it's easier to understand a lot about our society. This also helps us to see where there may be an opening for evangelism.

The best evangelism? Love one another

How do you get people without communities connected to a church? How do you inspire LCMS members to feel confident inviting their friends into the true community that is the church?

Empirically, there's an answer to these questions. The 2023 Lutheran Religious Life Survey asked about 2,000 current LCMS members a range of questions about their opinions, their life stories and their churches. One simple fact shone through: **One of the best predictors of evangelistic behavior (meaning inviting people to church, discussing your faith with people who don't share it, or mentioning Lutheranism when meeting new people) was the frequency with which the respondent spent social time with fellow church members.** LCMS members who socialize with other church members a lot reported doing quite a lot of evangelistic behavior. LCMS members who don't socialize with other church members did far less. Even after controlling for extraversion as a personality trait and personal beliefs about the importance of evangelism, LCMS laypeople who reported approximately weekly-or-more frequency of hanging out with other church members outside of church had almost *double* the frequency of evangelistic behaviors as LCMS laypeople who rarely or never socialized with other church members. Relatedly, LCMS members who reported being proud of their congregation were also likelier to invite others into it.

These findings may seem counterintuitive: How can it be that the Lutherans most focused on socializing *with other Lutherans* are the same people *doing the most evangelism*? But the answer is surprisingly obvious: People are eager to invite people into communities they like, and not into communities they don't. If you think your fellow church members are wonderful people to spend an evening with, you're likely to hang out with them.

You're also likely to invite your non-church friends to hang out with them. Maybe at a Reformation Day bonfire, your non-Christian friend will meet your pastor, and have a long overdue conversation. Maybe the new family that moved in down the block will join the regular playgroup with several church member families, and start attending church so their child can join the Sunday school. As church members socialize together, this creates social spaces that make invitation easy, and bridges the social gap into the church community. The first invite doesn't have to be the Divine Service (which isn't generally designed for "seekers" anyways), but can instead be to a party, or dinner, or other lower-stakes activity.

Any sociologist who studies networks and groups will back this up, and in fact [research by sociologist Rodney Stark](#) and other scholars suggests exactly this kind of social-bridging can explain much of the rise of early Christianity. These kinds of gravitational ties, where people outside of a group get linked into its orbit, then drawn ever-more-deeply-in by growing social ties, are pretty much universal to human social life. God has written our desire for community deeply into our hearts. Social ties are not the same thing as *faith*, but they do bring people into more social contact with Christians — and hopefully, into the Divine Service — where they will hear the Word of God proclaimed to them. Church is not a social club — yet the "mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren" (Smalcald Articles IV) is a vital part of what it is for a group of people to truly be an *ecclesia*. And unlike the worldly social ties that might lead someone into lies, social ties drawing our neighbors into greater fellowship with Lutherans give the opportunity for "faith [to come] from hearing" (Rom. 10:17): whether in mealtime prayers socializing over dinner, bedtime prayers for kids before a game night for the parents, hymns sung on a camping trip, or an eventual visit to the Divine Service.

If we want to see more *invitation*, the path to that is not just this or that new evangelism curriculum, or a powerful exhortation in a sermon, or a special Sunday school series: The path runs through cookouts and going to the zoo and visiting retirement homes and high school musicals. **They will know that we are Christian by our love — for the world at large, yes, but most especially for one another.** When we love one another, when we live

our social life outside of church as if we actually *like* one another and our church, our neighbors can tell.

And indeed, this is the model Jesus Himself demonstrated. How many of those who followed Him knew His doctrine *first*? Few. Most who followed our Lord *first* knew Him as a healer, or as a friend of sinners, or a prophet, or the man who fed them, or a guy at a wedding — they fell in love with the man, and so were prepared by His works of love to receive the His life-giving Words.

Statistically, this is how it often works for LCMS churches too. In the Lutheran Religious Life Survey, less than a third of converts to the LCMS reported that our doctrines were a key factor in why they first walked through our doors: they first came through a wide variety of social ties, and then learned our doctrine. When our churches are genuine communities of love where people pour into one another's lives outside of Sunday, those congregations have higher rates of invitation, higher likelihood of having recent converts, and (though survey data on this is imprecise), very likely more positive change in congregational numbers.

This is not some snake-oil church growth equation: “just add some church cookouts and watch the new members pour in!” Rather, it is a timeless truth, that communities confident in what they are offering are more convincing to those around them. Churches that wish to draw others in would do well to be bold, confident communities with a distinctive way of life, including a distinctively committed social life together. And we have every reason to be bold and confident, since what we offer is the very Word, and the very body and blood, of the Son of God.

Cover image: LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford



HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Dec. 9th Don & Karen Price



LW Editorial: On the Election

by Roy S. Askins

November 12, 2024

As I write this, the final votes for president of the United States of America are still being tallied. By all appearances, it seems that Donald J. Trump will be the 47th president of our country. It appears the Republicans have won the Senate and the House. Many of you will welcome this as a victory; some of you are dismayed and afraid.

“Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation” (Psalm 146:3), the psalmist sang. It remains true. Whether or not “your guy” will soon be sitting in the White House or walking through the halls of Congress, do not trust in men to save you. For the Lord’s “delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor His pleasure in the legs of a man, but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His steadfast love” (Psalm 147:10–11).

As citizens of this great nation, we use our God-given reason to elect men and women who we believe will most closely rule according to God’s will and Word. But we also know that the U.S. has maintained a perfect record of electing sinners to be presidents and senators and representatives: every single one of them.

Our Lord doesn’t delight in the great buildings we have built or the great acts of legislation we have crafted. What He does delight in are those who fear Him, who hope in His steadfast love. The final and ultimate victory for God’s people will not come because we elected the right guy to public office. It will not come because we have finally enacted that one piece of legislation that will close all the abortion loopholes.

The ultimate victory comes only as the Word of God goes forth, preached into every ear, washed onto every forehead, and placed into every mouth. That is to say, the ultimate victory happens as, one by one, the Holy Spirit creates faith in God's elect and gathers them into the ark of the holy church through His Means of Grace.

This truth has profound implications for the church in the U.S. as we eye up the next four years.

First, it means the church still has enemies. The fact that one party or another occupies the halls of power doesn't mean that the church is safe. This beautiful bride of Christ still faces off against the devil and the world, which have set up a cultural siege against her. And that means: Gird up for war. Not against people, not against those in political office, but against principalities and powers. You know the armor. If you need a reminder, go read Ephesians 6. Note that almost everything in that list is a defensive weapon, except the sword. Prepare for the assault from Satan.

And then pray for your enemies. Pray for your persecutors. Pray for those who slander you and say all kinds of evil things against you falsely (cf. Matt. 5:11, 43–48). The people attacking you do not know what they do. They have been deceived by the father of lies. Pray for them. Whether it's your party in power or not, pray for those who hate you.

Second, the transformation of hearts and minds will not — cannot — be carried out in the halls of power in Washington, D.C., or through any political office. The government exists for the curbing of wickedness and for the common good. It does not exist for the sake of convicting hearts of the moral sins that plague this country. No constitutional amendment will convict sinners of the moral abomination of murdering unborn children. It is God who convicts us through His Law given us in His Word: “You shall not murder” (Ex. 20:13). No legislation will change hearts that believe the mutilation of children in the name of “gender expression” is moral good. It is God who guides our hearts through His Word: “in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27). And while reason may lead to these convictions, convicted souls will find no comfort except that which comes from God's Word: “For all

have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23–24).

This means that you and I, dear brothers and sisters, need to turn not to princedoms and powers, not to presidents and senators and representatives and congressional bills, but to neighbors and family and friends. We must speak the Word of God's truth with them. Pray for them. Invite them to worship with you. When they visit you, read God's Word with them in family devotions. Make your home a place of God's Word and truth, a place bathed in the light of God's peace. Invite any and all who are interested to come and hear. And when they ask about the hope you have, about the love you share, pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance and speak God's Word of truth.

Finally, get involved at your local level. Certainly, at church. To have something to share, you must be filled with what God gives in the Divine Service. But also consider getting involved in politics at your local level. We too often focus on the big movers and shakers in the political scene. But your local government — your city, county and maybe even state — have much more influence over your life than you might realize. Advocate for policies that accord with Christian beliefs at your local school board; speak with your mayor; encourage your city council members with God's Word. These changes have a way of “trickling up” and directing the larger politics of the country.

God may or may not bless these political endeavors. He will certainly grant success to His church. It may not, at first glance, appear to be success. Your individual congregations may not grow in the number of people gathered in the pews on Sunday; you may not see a burgeoning of the budget in the years ahead. But God's Word will succeed, although we may not personally see that success. For wherever it is preached, He promises that it will accomplish the purpose for which He sent it.

Rev. Roy S. Askins is executive editor of The Lutheran Witness.

The Lutheran Witness magazine
Subscribe today at cph.org/witness

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
LCMS Stewardship Ministry
Newsletter article – December 2024

Repenting of “Yours” and “Mine”

Retailers have had their Christmas displays up since before Reformation Sunday. The kids have made their list and checked it twice, or three times or more. It won't be long before the tree will start shedding its needles, the stockings emptied, the gifts unwrapped, toys broken, and the too small or out of style clothes returned. Before we know it, the annual celebration of Christmas will be over.

But for the children of God, we know that the gift of Christmas doesn't ever end. Week in and week out, the Lord continues to shower His gifts on us. Every time the Lord gathers us to His house, and we are led to kneel at His table, the gift of forgiveness is repeatedly granted to us. It is nothing we deserve. It comes to us freely!

The fourth stanza of the stewardship hymn, “Forgive Us Lord for Shallow Thankfulness” (LSB 788) highlights both this gift and our response.

*Teach us, O Lord, true thankfulness divine,
that gives as Christ gave, never counting cost*

To learn thankfulness is necessary. The parents of young children are well-versed in the fact that they must teach their children thankfulness. It does not come naturally. The spiritual genetics inherited from our parents allow us to think that the world revolves around us. When we receive something, there is an inward desire to think that we in some way deserve it.

But there is no way that we deserve anything we get from our Lord. We need that ongoing lesson from God Himself. Thankfulness toward God is worked in us by the Holy Spirit. God's Word works this thanksgiving in us. We need this weekly reminder that Jesus didn't consider “equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself” for us, to the point of death on a cross (Phil. 2:6). He didn't bat an eye. He paid the price! Our life of stewardship is one of daily and weekly thanksgiving inspired by the Lord Himself.

*That knows no barrier of “yours” and “mine,”
assured that only what's withheld is lost.*

Because Jesus gave us everything and more, there can be no ownership. The child at Christmas is quick to claim that the newly gifted toy is “mine!” But as Psalm 24:1 asserts, “The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.” There isn't anything in creation that is ours. When we cling to and claim ownership of anything in creation, we are losing out on the continual gifts with which the Lord desires to shower upon us. Closed hands cannot receive anything new. We cling to the old and dead and miss the new thing that the Lord desires to do in and for us.

We are led to repent of the “yours” and “mine” and remove the lie that we have any ownership. In this we have the promise that God will continue to give to us. Not just at Christmas, but every Sunday at the altar in the Lord's house.

LCMS Stewardship Ministry lcms.org/stewardship

UPCOMING SPECIAL SERVICES

Midweek Advent Services

Wednesdays at 10:30 a.m. @ St. Peter

Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. @ St. Luke

December 4, 11, 18

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

December 24th 5:00 p.m. @ St. Peter

7:00 p.m. @ St. Luke

Christmas Day

December 25th 8:30 a.m. @ St. Peter

10:30 a.m. @ St. Luke

New Year's Eve

December 31st 5:00 p.m. @ St. Peter

December 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 First Sunday in Advent <i>Blue</i> 8:30 Divine Service Special Voters Meeting	2 7:00p Joint Committee Meeting @ St. Luke	3 6:30p Bible Study	4 10:30 Midweek Advent Service 4:00p Confirmation Class @ St. Luke 7:00p Midweek Advent Service @ St. Luke	5	6 10:00 Bible Study @ Terra Verde, Chilton	7 9:00 Christmas Brunch Set-up
8 Second Sunday in Advent <i>Blue</i> 8:30 Divine Service (NC) Christmas Social	9	10 6:30p Bible Study	11 10:30 Midweek Advent Service 4:00p Confirmation Class @ St. Luke 7:00p Midweek Advent Service @ St. Luke	12 6:00p Elders Meeting	13 10:00 Bible Study @ Terra Verde, Chilton	14
15 Third Sunday in Advent <i>Blue</i> 8:30 Divine Service 9:30 Sunday School	16	17 6:30p Bible Study	18 10:30 Midweek Advent Service 4:00p Confirmation Class @ St. Luke 7:00p Midweek Advent Service @ St. Luke	19 6:30p Council Meeting	20 10:00 Bible Study @ Terra Verde, Chilton	21 Winter Begins
22 Fourth Sunday in Advent <i>Blue</i> 8:30 Divine Service (NC)	23 Newsletter Articles Due	24 Christmas Eve <i>White</i> 5:00p Candlelight Service 7:00p Candlelight Service @ St. Luke	25 Christmas Day <i>White</i> 8:30 Divine Service 10:30 Divine Service @ St. Luke	26	27	28
29 First Sunday after Christmas <i>White</i> 8:30 Divine Service	30	31 New Year's Eve <i>White</i> 5:00p New Year's Eve Service			Altar Guild: Dean & Jan Bergelin	
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Divine Services marked (NC) will not have Holy Communion