

October 2018 VOL 61 NO. 4

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

"...The Scripture Cannot Be Broken." (John 10:35)



*"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood,
a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim
the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."*

I PETER 2:9



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501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI, 54701



Postmaster: Periodicals postage paid at Eau Claire WI 54701 and additional offices (825-580). ISSN#0024-7537. Send address corrections (Form 3579) to Lutheran Spokesman, 501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI, 54701.

The Lutheran Spokesman is published monthly by the Church of the Lutheran Confession, 501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI, 54701, and is an official organ of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). Website address: www.clclutheran.org.

Editor: Paul Naumann, 3732 Claymore Lane, Eau Claire, WI, 54701, E-mail to paul.naumann@ilc.edu; Assistant Editor: Craig Owings; Art Director, Graphic Designer, Print Production: Matthew Schaser; Proofreaders: David Lau and Paula Naumann; Staff: James Albrecht, David Bernthal, Timothy Daub, Wayne Eichstadt, David Fuerstenau, Frank Gantt, Norman Greve, Mark Gullerud, John Klatt, Ross Kok, Joseph Lau, Delwyn Maas, Bruce Naumann, Nathan Pfeiffer, David Reim, Sam Rodebaugh, Michael Roehl, Robert Sauer, Thomas Schuetze, Chad Seybt, Mark Weis.

Material submitted for publication should be sent to Editor Paul Naumann three months before date of publication. Announcements and other short notices should also be sent to Editor Naumann.

Business Manager: Rev. James Sandeen, 501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI, 54701. E-mail to jim.sandeen@ilc.edu. Individual subscriptions (foreign-U.S. currency only): \$18.00 {\$36.00} for one year; \$34.00 {\$50.00} for two years; \$50.00 {\$72.00} for three years; sent in bulk to congregations: \$15.00.

Send address or payment question requests to: lutheranspokesman@ilc.edu
Spokesman Online Version at: www.lutheranspokesman.org
Printed in U.S.A.

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On the cover: children and adults assemble to hear the Word in Bangladesh.



Royal Priests, by Order of Our Great High Priest

When you think of a priest, a lot of terrible news stories might come to mind. Sins have become public and all too commonly connected with the word *priest*. This, however, is no modern issue. Even Aaron, whom God appointed as priest over the Israelites in the desert, failed to live up to his calling. He made a golden calf for the people to worship (Exodus 32). Eli's sons, the priests Hophni and Phinehas, were notoriously evil (1 Samuel 2:22-23). The chief priests in Jesus' time took part in crucifying Him (Matthew 27:20). The high priest was part of the judicial body that condemned Stephen to death for preaching about Jesus (Acts 7). We Christians are called priests, but what can that mean for us when so many have failed in this calling?

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10)

The Bible clearly includes all Christians in the "royal priesthood" mentioned in 1 Peter 2:9. This is not the same as the Old Testament priesthood. In the Old Testament, only the descendants of Aaron were to be priests. In general, they fulfilled the important duties of performing sacrifices and speaking to God on behalf of the people. But these sacrifices were not enough. As hymnist Isaac Watts wrote, "Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain." (TLH 156)

Along with the failures of priests recorded in Scripture,

we are intimately familiar with our own failures as royal priests. How many times have we passed up opportunities to glorify and spread our Savior's name? Thankfully, there is one High Priest who lived up to the job: *"For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever."* (Hebrews 7:26-28)

Christ, our great High Priest, lived a perfect life and paid for all our sins with His innocent death on the cross. He now makes every Christian a royal priest. Literature is filled with stories of the weak finding they have been chosen for something much greater, but we need not look to fiction for the greatest example of this. Miserable sinners are forgiven, raised up to the rank of royal priests, and given the commission to spread the good news of Christ crucified to all people, accompanied by God's promise *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:20)

"Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)



Ross Kok is a teacher at Holy Cross Lutheran School in Phoenix, Arizona.

The Unseen Church

“The hand is quicker than the eye” is a

very familiar adage. This saying was demonstrated to me quite thoroughly just last year. Our town had a festival at which a street magician was performing. Time and again this man astounded the gathered crowd with his sleight of hand. One trick in particular had me flummoxed, because I knew the trick. I had seen videos on the preparation and deception, and yet I couldn't see this man's execution. I saw the result, as we all did, but how did he get there?

There are many things invisible or unknowable in this world. Thankfully, the most important of them are revealed to us by our heavenly Father in His Word. In the Nicene Creed we confess that our heavenly Father is “Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.” Throughout Scripture we hear of one of God's most majestic invisible creations. It is a vast building, made of living stones, stretching throughout time and into eternity—the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. This invisible creation of our God is made up of saints, redeemed sinners washed in the blood of Christ. It extends from Adam and Eve, who heard and believed the first Gospel promise, down to the last individual the Lord will call to Himself.

Throughout the world one can see the evidences of the Holy Christian Church—believers gathering together with like-minded individuals in visible churches and armies of missionaries going out to preach the Gospel to the poor in spirit are some examples. But, how does this Church come into existence and grow?

A magician, better termed an illusionist, uses items for his tricks. Whether with cards, coins, foam balls or rabbits,

It is a vast building, made of living stones, stretching throughout time and into eternity.

he will attempt to astound the audience. However, it is with sleight of hand, misdirection, or tricky apparatus that the deeds are accomplished.

Our God, the Holy Spirit, needs no such trickery to accomplish His building and expanding of the Christian Church, for He is almighty—an eternal Person of the Holy Trinity, as are the Father and the Son. Although the Spirit has the power and might to do as He chooses, He has chosen tools or means by which He gets the work done. The Gospel in Word and sacrament is the tool the Holy Spirit uses to build the Church on earth. When the

Gospel is taught in its truth and purity and when baptism is performed according to God's command, the Holy Spirit has the means to create faith in the heart of a lost soul.

As amazed as people are over tricks, illusions, and being fooled, the result of the work of the Holy Spirit is truly miraculous. Lost and condemned sinners, destined for an eternity in hell, are transformed by the Spirit's work into righteous children of God with a new heavenly destination. In fact, the Scriptures tell us that we become something altogether different through our faith in Jesus, supplied by the Holy Spirit. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

What a blessing that we have been called and gathered by the Spirit into this marvelous Church! What a privilege that we can share in the expanding of the Church by spreading the Gospel message of sins forgiven in Christ!

And what a joyous consummation when Jesus will gather His Church to Himself where we will praise the Lamb perfectly and eternally together!



David W. Bernthal is the principal of Luther Memorial School in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

LSB 845

“Where Charity and Love Prevail”

On what is now known as Maundy Thursday, Jesus gathered in an upper room with His disciples to celebrate the Passover with them before He died. In the course of that evening, He said to them, “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another.” (John 13:34 CSB17) He wanted His followers to love one another by serving each other in a self-sacrificing way, and He demonstrated such love that same evening when He took up the job of a servant and washed His disciples’ feet (John 13:14-15).

Serving others, however, is not an activity that comes naturally to us. We must be reminded frequently of Christ’s love and service to us so that we are moved to reflect that sort of loving activity in our own lives. From perhaps as early as the fourth century, one way that the matter of Christian love was regularly kept before the people was through the Latin hymn *Ubi caritas*. This hymn was customarily sung on Maundy Thursday (and still is in some circles).

A metrical translation/adaptation of the ancient hymn into English was made in 1960 by Omer Westendorf, and appears in *Lutheran Service Book* (845). The first stanza reads, “**Where charity and love prevail / There God is ever found; / Brought here together by Christ’s love / By love we are thus bound.**”

In our Christian congregations today, we understand that we did not come together by accident. Christ demonstrated His self-sacrificing love toward us all through His death on the cross to pay for our sin and through His resurrection from the dead to seal our eternal life in heaven. We now having been bought by Him, His Holy Spirit called us and gathered us together around that cross and empty tomb. By His acts of love, we are brought into Christian

fellowship with others that we might serve God and also our neighbors.

**Love demonstrated
in forgiveness eases
the strife and tension
that so often arises
between us, and
brings about peace.**

As He taught His disciples on Maundy Thursday, Christ continues to teach us what love is (Stanza 2): “**With grateful joy and holy fear / His charity we learn; / Let us with heart and mind and soul / Now love Him in return.**”

The third stanza focuses on the heart of both Jesus’ love and ours: The forgiveness of sins. It reads, “**Forgive we now each other’s faults / As we our faults confess, / And let us love each other well / In Christian holiness.**” By nature we want to hold onto those things others do to hurt us because it gives us something we can bring up against them later. But when a brother or sister comes to you confessing and desiring to be rid of a sin, you have the blessed privilege of sharing Christ’s own forgiveness with that person. Further, you can reassure such that neither will you use their fault against them. What an act of service this is that we can do for one another! What an act of love it is!

Love demonstrated in forgiveness eases the strife and tension that so often arises between us, and brings about peace. This peace is a blessing from the Lord. Therefore, the apostle writes, “. . . as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:10 CSB17). And we pray along with the fourth stanza, “**Let strife among us be unknown; / Let all contention cease; / Be God’s the glory that we seek; / Be ours His holy peace.**”



David Schaller is pastor of Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sister Lakes, Michigan. He also prepares the “Bread of Life” devotions for the *Lutheran Spokesman*.

The Shibboleth Dilemma

While living in South Dakota, I worked with a colleague who was originally from New England. He was an odd-spoken sort of fellow. When he needed to clean his hands, he went to the *warshroom*. He later drove home in his *cab*. For supper he ate *squarsh* while sitting on his *pawch*. I'd kid him about his peculiar dialect; he'd respond by calling my Midwestern tongue bland and boring. All was said in fun: no harm, no foul, no dilemma.

Such has not always been the case. The twelfth chapter of Judges relates a civil war between Gilead and the men of Ephraim. It all started when the Ammonites, who had for eighteen years oppressed the tribes of Israel on the eastern side of the Jordan River, crossed over and invaded the lands of Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim. Jephthah, though the son of a harlot, had become a mighty man of valor, living a sort of outlaw life in the land of Tob. It was he whom the Gileadites chose as their leader in the fight against Ammon.

Under his command, Jephthah and his men advanced against the Ammonites and subdued this enemy, thus delivering Israel from its oppression.

Barely had the blood of battle dried when the men of Ephraim crossed the Jordan River and challenged Jephthah with an arrogant, bogus charge. "Why did you . . . not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you with fire!" (Judges 12:1) Ephraim, it seems, had wanted no part of the perceived suicide mission against Ammon. But after the Lord had given Gilead victory over the Ammonites, Ephraim wanted to share in the glory. It became a *casus belli*, a civil war in which Jephthah was again victorious. Holding the fords of the Jordan against any escaping Ephraimites, the fugitives were asked to say the password "Shibboleth." What a dilemma! Those who spoke the dialect of Ephraim could only pronounce it *Sibboleth*. Thus, 42,000 Ephraimites were identified and executed.

What a warning against pride and arrogance! But is there a New Testament password that must be known? Indeed,

indeed! It is "Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior!" The heart of the Gospel promise is that whoever believes in God's Son shall have everlasting life (John 3:16). Saint Peter, preaching Jesus of Nazareth, added that there is "no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

But His name must be correctly pronounced. It must be said with the dialect of faith and truth. In this there are many who say *Sibboleth*. John warned believers of his day against those who denied Jesus' true humanity. Arius spoke of Jesus, but not as true God, not equal in attributes and essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Luther contended with a church which did not confess Jesus to be Savior by grace alone. Many today pronounce the name *Jesus* only as a good man, a good example and new law-giver. *Sibboleth* speakers all! At the final Jordan crossing they will be clearly identified and dispatched.

But there is a further dilemma. Sinners must speak the name correctly, yet it is not in their power to do so. So Paul testified that "no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:3) Indeed, without the Spirit, a great dilemma. But with Him, no dilemma at all, for He is the great Teacher of the heavenly dialect.

Therefore, humble yourself, putting away pride and arrogance. Do not grieve the Spirit, but pray that He ever teach your heart and loosen your tongue to correctly confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Shibboleth! In the Hebrew it can mean deep or flowing water. And that is what Jesus claimed to be—the "living water" offered to thirsty sinners. Whoever drinks of Him will become "a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14) So He promised! *Shibboleth!* Say it faithfully, not as a dilemma, but as the password to our heavenly home.



David Fuerstenau is pastor of Holy Truth Lutheran Church in Ketchikan, Alaska.

A Choice between Two Mountains

For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.")

And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.") But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

(Hebrews 12:18-24)

Many are the mountains on planet earth. Sight of these land formations can be either awe-inspiring or frightening. Concerning the first kind of experience, driving through the Grand Tetons in Wyoming fills us with amazement at this enormous wonder. As for the latter kind of impression, just ask anyone who survived an avalanche or suffered loss from a volcanic eruption. The Children of Israel were faced with the choice between two mountains—either turning back to Mount Sinai or remaining with Mount Zion. While the first of the two is terrifying, the second is truly glorious. The reference to these two mountains is not so much about geography as it is about their spiritual significance

All the sights and sounds at Mount Sinai where God delivered His Law aroused the fear of death. An even greater dread is pictured here, and comes from the prospect of falling into the hands of a holy God, Whose Law exposes our sinfulness and condemns us without providing any way for us to save ourselves (see Hebrews 10:31, Romans 6:23, and Galatians 3:10).

Jewish Christians, who were pressured to return to a religion that relied upon work-righteousness for salvation, were warned by God not to revert to this hopeless belief. While our human nature is drawn to it and non-Christian religions promote it, the Law of God reveals this as a dead-end street (Romans 3:19-20).

All believers are encouraged to remain with Mount Zion, for therein is found God's saving grace in Christ Jesus, as well as the resultant spirit of peace, joy, and hope. This

mountain is not a place, but rather a people—the Holy Christian Church. Verses 22 and 23 list for us what we are and what we have as the Church of God.

First off, we are "*the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.*" Through faith in Jesus we are God's city. As the Lord dwells in us, He blesses us with peace in the knowledge of His forgiveness and saving favor. Reigning in our hearts, He instills love in us to obey His commands.

We are also "*the church of the firstborn.*" In the Old Testament, the firstborn had an advantage over the other children. The firstborn received a double portion of the inheritance. When we were adopted into God's family, we became His firstborn. The inheritance we receive from God is far grander than any other inheritance. Scripture calls it "*an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.*" (1 Peter 1:4)

Can we be confident of receiving this heavenly inheritance? Yes, indeed! This passage goes on to declare that our names are "*registered in heaven.*" (verse 23) By birth in the United States we became citizens of this country. As born-again children of God, our names are registered as citizens of heaven.

With all these blessings in Mount Zion, who wants to go back to Mount Sinai where there is only eternal death?



Praise God for making us part of Mount Zion by His grace through faith in Christ Jesus!

Mark Gullerud is pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Bowdle, South Dakota, and Zion Lutheran Church in Ipswich, South Dakota.

“That’s Just Your Interpretation.”

Quite obviously, there are many interpretations of the Bible. The seven-mile stretch of road that my church is on averages one church every eight tenths of a mile—three Baptist, two “non-denominational,” two Pentecostal, one Episcopal, and one Lutheran. These churches exist precisely because they each have a different interpretation of Holy Scripture in some respect. So, when someone says, “That’s just your interpretation,” understand that he is accustomed to there being various interpretations of God’s Word.

Our goal in all such conversations should be to demonstrate from God’s Word that though there are many interpretations, there can be only one *correct* interpretation. The subjectivism of our day does make that difficult, but not impossible.

What one should understand from the outset is that “That’s just your interpretation” is meant to be a conversation stopper. If you can have your interpretation and I can have my interpretation, then there’s no use discussing the matter any longer because, well, we each have a different interpretation. It’s a smokescreen, set up so that the one who makes such a claim doesn’t have to actually defend his own wrong interpretation. He can believe it simply because he believes it.

In order to penetrate the smokescreen, it is important to establish that the Bible is of divine origin. Quote 2 Timothy 3:16: “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.*” (ESV) If the one with whom you are discussing an issue agrees that the Bible is God’s Word, you have grounds for proceeding with your discussion. If not, further discussion becomes increasingly difficult since there is no foundation for truth. In that case, it is best to speak simple words of Law and Gospel, being confident that the Holy Spirit works when and where He pleases.

If the person acknowledges the Bible to be God’s Word, then it becomes a matter of how God interprets His own words. The only reliable interpreter of the Bible is God

Himself, and He tells us specifically that “*no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*” (2 Peter 1:20-21 ESV)

This passage assures us that the doctrines of the Christian faith are not open to our own personal preferences and subjective reasoning. God says plainly what He means and means what He plainly says.

Let us not forget the purpose for which God has given us His Word, because it is critical in this discussion. God didn’t give us His Word to force us into a set of rules and regulations to abide by or a church denomination to belong to. He gave us His Word as the means by which He rescues us from our sin and eternal condemnation by granting us faith in His Son, Jesus. If one were stuck in a building that was engulfed in flames, he wouldn’t subject the fireman’s words to the same foolish argument that is so often applied to the Bible. If the fireman said, “Follow me,” it is doubtful that one would say to those who are following the fireman, “Well, that’s just your interpretation.”

God’s Word is His plea with us to escape, through repentance and faith, the condemnation that is coming upon the world. His sincere desire is that sinners know the truth and be set free by that truth (John 8:32). In His wisdom and grace, He doesn’t leave our deliverance up to our own personal interpretations, but gives us specific and clear statements by which He delivers us from sin, death, and hell. If any passage of the Bible is open to personal interpretation, then every passage is open to personal interpretation. Conversely, if the Bible has but one interpretation, then faith has a solid foundation in this simple and clear statement, “*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.*” (Mark 16:16 ESV)



Frank Gantt is pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Loganville, Georgia.

The ROAD TO REFORMATION

In observation of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, we are presenting a brief survey of the life of Martin Luther. The series continues with major events in the life of the Reformer that took place after 1517.

—1537— The Smalcald Articles

"All flesh is grass. . . . The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever."

(Isaiah 40:6,8)

By 1537, Martin Luther was becoming increasingly aware of his own frailty. His health began to fade. He no longer had the pace of his youth (although still prolific by most standards). And his Genesis lectures revealed an introspective admission that no man could expound upon the Bible's full wisdom on his own.

At the same time, though, God showed Luther gracious signs that his bold witness would not wither and die when he was in his grave. Luther reorganized the Wittenberg University curriculum for a new crop of theologians he saw God raising up to teach in his place. And the Lord seemed to be protecting pure Gospel preaching for years to come as princes loyal to the Lutheran confession allied themselves in the Schmalkaldic League.

Emperor Charles V observed this growing German independence too, and called for a church council (a free conference) to preserve secular peace. Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, asked Luther to set the ground rules for such talks.

Luther prepared a document which he hoped would serve as the framework for any future doctrinal discussions. The council never came to fruition as planned, but the German princes accepted Luther's work as their symbol of faith.

These Smalcald Articles consist of three parts. The first part reviews the Trinity and incarnation, points of agreement between the Lutherans and Rome. Luther believed there was no need to reopen controversies settled centuries prior.

The second part constitutes the true crucible of the Reformation: *"that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."* (Romans 3:28) Luther said, "Of this article nothing can be yielded or surrendered." Reflecting on the two decades since 1517, Luther clarified that all of his teaching against Roman error was simply a relentless defense of this chief doctrine.



The third part speaks of doctrines he felt might yet have to face their time of trial. Luther knew that more controversy lay ahead for the church, where articles clear to him at the time might be debated "with learned and reasonable men, or among ourselves." He feared the next generation would have to wrestle with questions concerning original sin, the Law/Gospel distinction, ceremonies, and more.

He was right. After his death, the Formula of Concord would be needed to maintain the confession of the true doctrine when controversy arose over these very articles.

Since then, the Lutheran church has seen many sad departures from—and bold stands for—God's Word. Even our Church of the Lutheran Confession was born out of such necessity and has dealt with her own questions. That "third part" of the Smalcald Articles foresaw several of them, like our synod's resolutions on the ministry and the third use of the law. By God's grace, though, each time of trial has ended with a pure and united confession.

Questions spring up from the flesh like grass from the ground, but God grants answers from Holy Scripture, for through it all, *"the Word of the Lord endures forever."* (I Peter 1:25)

The Smalcald Articles were the Reformer's last will and testament, expressing his confidence that although he was fading, God alone would preserve His truth.

May you come to find with age, as Luther did, that as you can do less and less, your Savior fills the void with faith in Him and His precious Word.

**He knows how frail our powers / Who but from
dust are made; / We flourish like the flowers, /
And even so we fade . . .**

**God's grace alone endureth, / And children's
children yet shall prove / How He with strength
assureth / The hearts of all that
seek His love.**

(TLH 34, verses 3-4)



Timothy Daub is pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Hecla, South Dakota.

Berea Lutheran Church Sioux Falls, South Dakota

In 1623, the hymn writer, Georg Weissel wrote,

“Seek where ye may To find a way That leads to your salvation . . .”



For the Bereans in Macedonia, that way was found in only one place: the Holy Scriptures. So, when the Apostle Paul arrived at this crossroads of Greek learning preaching Christ crucified, “[The Bereans] received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” (Acts 17:11) Because of the Spirit-given reputation of the “fair-minded” Bereans, congregations down through the ages have found the name *Berea* to be not only a fitting but also a descriptive name for a congregation. The confessional Lutherans who settled on East Madison Street in Sioux Falls are no exception. Blessed by the Holy Spirit with a faith founded on Holy Scripture, the Bereans of Sioux Falls have been striving with God’s help to live up to the name since 1978.

That year, Pastor Vernon Greve of Watertown, South Dakota, began holding Sunday evening services in a home in Sioux Falls. By 1981 services were being held every other Sunday at the Valley National Bank. Pastor Robert Wehrwein of Okabena, Minnesota, also conducted some of these services. On June 3, 1984, seminary graduate Roland H. Gurgel was ordained and installed as Berea’s

first resident pastor. At the time, the congregation numbered twenty-three souls and was received into voting membership of the CLC at the 1984 Synod Convention.

In 1986, four acres were purchased in the northeast area of Sioux Falls. In the fall of 1987 the congregation began to construct a chapel/parsonage combination. The building was put to use in February of 1988, and on July 24th that same year it was dedicated to the glory of the Lord. Under Pastor Lawrence Bade, a large sign was put up in 1991 to let travelers know the building was a church.

The congregation experienced a temporary setback in 1997 when Pastor James Shrader, after being there only a brief time, was removed from office because of doctrinal disagreement. Some members of the congregation left with Pastor Shrader. It remains the prayer of the congregation that one day the Lord would lead those parishioners home to Berea. The Spirit provided the Bereans with a replacement shepherd in Pastor John Hein in 1998. While Pastor Hein was in Sioux Falls for only two years, the congregation still remembers with thanks his leadership during that time.



Children of Berea's vacation Bible school.

In 2001, Pastor Mark Gurath replaced Pastor Hein, and spearheaded outreach efforts by beginning a program known as “Friends on Fridays,” conducting services for the developmentally disabled two Fridays a month at the South Dakota Achieve Center in Sioux Falls.

In August of 2007, the congregation began the project of enlarging the parsonage to meet the needs of a growing family. Another temporary setback occurred in 2013 when Pastor Gurath was led to resign his pastoral call for health reasons. But the Lord blessed the Bereans richly with capable lay-people. Rather than calling a vacancy pastor, members of the congregation shouldered the burden of conducting services and ministering to Berea's membership themselves during the interim, until the Holy Spirit answered their call for a new pastor in 2014.

Pastor Joel Fleischer arrived in September of 2014 to find a congregation that had continued to grow in spite of vacancy. While many other Midwestern towns are declining in population, Sioux Falls—at the crossroad of Interstates 29 and 90, literally on the road to everywhere—has been experiencing a population and construction boom. In a city that has grown from 150,000 in 2010 to 180,000 in 2018, God has brought in CLC members from across the Midwest to fill the little church on East Madison Street to overflowing, with a membership of sixty-two souls, and an average attendance of forty to fifty.

While Berea has, in the last few years, become a self-supporting congregation, it remains a dedicated mission church. With the rapid growth of the Sioux Falls area, the congregation is embarking on a program to reach out to new Sioux Falls residents, confident that the Lord of the

Church will use the beacon of His Word to bring in souls who are eager to search the Scriptures.

As it is God who has given (and will continue to give) the increase in souls, it is the prayer of the Bereans that He would also lead them to see how He plans for the congregation to provide seating for these souls. Having paid off Berea's mortgage in 2016, the congregation is now exploring plans for the addition of a larger sanctuary and fellowship hall. The hope is to convert the current sanctuary into classrooms for Sunday School and, one day, a Christian Day School for the twenty-three preschool and grade-school aged Bereans.

As one might expect in a congregation named “Berea,” Christian education is a priority. There were twenty-four pre-confirmation children enrolled in Vacation Bible School this year, and a similar number enrolled in Sunday school, with three students undergoing instruction in the catechism with Pastor Fleischer.

With that many children, one may wonder if the congregation has any trouble finding teachers. Thankfully, the Lord has blessed Berea with dedicated teachers and substitute teachers for each class. The ladies of Berea make up the majority of the teachers, and they also stay very active in the congregation through the ladies' group “S.I.N.G.” (Sisters In the Name of God) and enjoy many activities together, including attending the various women's conferences in the CLC.

The men, too, find themselves fully occupied, not only with voters' meetings, building committee, elders, and so on, but also with an informal men's group.

Services are held on Sunday mornings at 10:00 A.M., with Bible class and Sunday school preceding at 9:00 A.M. during the school year.

If you find yourself at the crossroads of America on I-29 and I-90, we hope that you will find your way to the little church on East Madison Street, and join us to search the Scriptures!

Seek where ye may To find a way / That leads to your salvation; / My heart is stilled, On Christ I build, He is the one Foundation. / His Word is sure, His works endure; / He doth o'erthrow My every foe; / Through Him I more than conquer. (TLH 383:1)



Joel Fleischer is pastor of Berea Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Iglesia Luterana Confesional Mexico (ILCM)

In April 2013, the CLC declared fellowship with the Iglesia Luterana Confesional Mexico (ILCM, Confessional Lutheran Church Mexico), led by Pastor Juan José Olvera, who is forty-three years old. Pastor Olvera was trained by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)-affiliated seminary in Torreón, Coahula. He graduated in 2006, served churches in Juarez (across the border from El Paso), Gomez Palacio, and Torreón, and was a seminary professor. He also traveled to Cuba to teach Hebrew and Pastoral Theology courses. He left the WELS-affiliated church body over the doctrine of fellowship and concerns over the adequacy of their pastoral training.

Pastor Olvera was born in Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico; which is across the border from El Paso, Texas. He grew up in Torreón, where he met his wife Claudia Bucio. They now have three children: Claudia Johanna, seventeen; Maria Elizabeth, fourteen; and Daniel, seven.

Pastor Olvera had heard about the CLC in seminary. He initially contacted Pastor Michael Roehl in Bismarck, North Dakota, six years ago (October 2012) after finding St. Paul Lutheran Church's website. After much correspondence, Pastor Roehl, President Eichstadt, and Pastor Daniel Fleischer met with Pastor Olvera at the end of January 2013 for extensive doctrinal discussions. The meeting took place in Nuevo Progreso across the border from Weslaco, Texas. Pastor Olvera came with detailed plans to form and develop the ILCM.

In 2014 Pastor Olvera and his family moved from Torreón to Ciudad Juarez to evangelize and to start a congregation there. In addition to this congregation, there are three mission churches: one in Torreón, one in Gomez Palacio (which is next to Torreón), and one in Ciudad Acuña, each with ten to fifteen people attending and being served by



Pastor Olvera and family.

This past July, seminary student Miguel Sanchez in Gomez Palacio was mistaken for a drug dealer. He was kidnapped and executed.

seminary students. Pastor Olvera has been teaching five seminary students: Carlos Holguin and Juan Carlos Chihuahua in Juarez, Braulio Bassot and Miguel Sanchez in the Torreón/Gomez Palacio area, and Luis Casango in Acuña. He has also started a pre-seminary program with three men (sixteen, seventeen, and thirty-eight years old) to prepare them for seminary classes and to help with worship services. Because the congregations do not have the means yet to support him, Pastor Olvera works at a secular job to provide for his family.

Pastor Olvera and the ILCM have faced many financial and health challenges, including his wife's cancer, his diabetes—which has led to kidney problems and the need for eye surgery—and many problems due to poverty and drug-related violence. In September, Seminarian Carlos Holguin suffered a heart attack, and the Lord brought him into His eternal rest. Carlos was thirty-eight and was planning to get married in October. This past July, seminary student Miguel Sanchez in Gomez Palacio was mistaken for a drug dealer. He was kidnapped and executed.

While we rejoice that the Lord has brought Miguel home, we pray for his wife Nohemy and two children, six and eight years old, who are left behind. Drug-related violence continues to plague northern Mexico, even making it dangerous to go out to eat as there is a real possibility of being caught in the crossfire of an assassination attempt of someone else in the restaurant.

Pastor Olvera has a number of Spanish-speaking contacts in El Paso, Texas. He is applying for a US visa so that he will be able to enter El Paso and serve them as well.



Peter Evensen is a full-time foreign missionary for the CLC. A Spanish speaker, he also serves as liaison to the ICLM. Pastor Evensen's home is in Chennai, India.

Contact in Bangladesh

The question is sometimes asked, “How did the CLC become involved with so many countries around the world?” The simple answer is that the Lord has graciously opened doors for us and uses our small church body to spread His Word in various parts of the world. But how does the Lord open these doors? How do we come into contact with new individuals and church bodies? What process do we follow to determine how to proceed with each new contact? A good example of how this process takes place can be seen in our recent dealings with a contact in Bangladesh, Pastor Monotosh Banarjee.

The Board of Missions does not actively seek out contacts with whom we might begin discussions. Contacts generally find us through the CLC website, one of our congregational websites, or personal contacts with individuals. After coming across the CLC website in the fall of 2016, Pastor Banarjee, wishing to learn more about the CLC, contacted President Eichstadt. Pastor Eichstadt sent this contact information to the Board of Missions, and Missionary Ohlmann began correspondence with Pastor Banarjee. The initial step is a screening email to try to determine the intent of the contact. This is done to try to weed out those who are simply after money from those who are sincere. If the contact seems sincere, correspondence continues.

In this case, correspondence continued by going through the *Shadows and Substance* adult instruction course, followed by a ten-lesson introduction to Lutheranism and the CLC based on the *CLC Statement of Faith and Purpose*. Pastor Banarjee has also completed the first few lessons of a Bible Interpretation course created for the Online Theological Studies website. Missionary Ohlmann reports

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the following: “Over the past several months, the contact in Bangladesh that I have been corresponding with seems very promising. He is very diligent and complete in the lessons that we have finished thus far. We communicate often as he works through the correspondence lessons and sends me regular reports on his work.”

Pastor Banarjee received a Bachelor of Theology degree from the College of Christian Theology in Bangladesh in 2009. This is an interdenominational school, but he had a few teachers with a Lutheran background from whom he learned Lutheran theology. Having become convinced that Lutheran theology is Biblical theology, he sought to find a true-teaching Lutheran church. His search brought him to the CLC.

Pastor Banarjee’s church body is called the Bangladesh Lutheran Church Mission (BLCM). This church body is made up of about 1200 first-generation Christians who have come out of Hinduism and Islam.

The next step in the process is a face-to-face visit, which Missionary Ohlmann hopes to accomplish in early 2019. This visit will give Missionary Ohlmann a chance to discuss Scripture with Pastor Banarjee in person and to observe the organizational structure of his church body. If all goes well, correspondence will continue, and additional visits will follow with the hope that doctrinal unity will be reached, and, Lord willing, fellowship will be declared.

While this is our sincere hope and prayer, a formal declaration of fellowship is still, most likely, years away. Most often it takes years of study and multiple face-to-face meetings before a declaration of fellowship is even discussed. In the meantime, we will continue to pray for

Pastor Banarjee and for the BLCM that the Lord will bless them through their ongoing study of His Word of truth.

Robert Sauers is pastor of Luther Memorial Church in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and a member of the CLC Board of Missions



Bangladesh, officially the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, is a country in South Asia. It shares land borders with India and Myanmar. Nepal, Bhutan and China are located near Bangladesh.

“BREAD OF LIFE” READINGS OCTOBER 2018

TLH = The Lutheran Hymnal, 1941; WS = Worship Supplement 2000; LSB = Lutheran Service Book, 2006

Date	Verse	Reading	Comments
Oct 1	TLH 261; LSB 655	Numbers 22:21-41	Balaam wanted to prophesy as Balak desired, but the Lord hindered him so that the truth came out instead.
Oct 2	TLH 570; LSB 558	Psalms 117	Meditate on the Lord's love and His faithfulness!
Oct 3	TLH 203	Psalms 118:13-24	Though we face trials and sorrows, the Lord does not give us over to death, but He becomes our salvation.
Oct 4	TLH 430	Proverbs 28:1-10	Better to give up earthly treasures and pursue righteousness than to gain much dishonestly.
Oct 5	TLH 323	Jonah 2:1-10	Jonah owned up to his sin and called on the Lord for help, trusting that only the Lord could save him.
Oct 6	TLH 466	Acts 4:1-13	Jesus' enemies had not gotten rid of Him by crucifying Him. Instead, Jesus' name had been made the most important in all the earth.
Oct 8	WS 759	Hebrews 6:13-20	It is impossible for God to change or break His promises, therefore we can count on Him and trust in His Word.
Oct 9	TLH 434; LSB 711	Numbers 27:12-23	Though Moses' time of leadership would come to an end, the Lord already had in mind the next godly man who would shepherd His people.
Oct 10	WS 796	Psalms 119:89-96	God's Word is eternal, enduring to this day and forever.
Oct 11	TLH 291	Psalms 119:105-112	God's Word is a lamp that lights our way in life.
Oct 12	TLH 541	Proverbs 30:24-28	What lessons can you learn from the four small creatures?
Oct 13	WS 775	Micah 4:1-5	When Jesus came, the Word of the Lord went out. It still goes out today so that we may walk in the name of the Lord.
Oct 15	TLH 228; LSB 502	Acts 5:1-11	Verses 3-5 contain a significant proof of the deity of the Holy Spirit. Do you see it?
Oct 16	TLH 156	Hebrews 10:1-12	The holy writer explains the purpose of the Old Testament sacrifices (vv. 1, 3) and the one-time sacrifice of Jesus Christ for all sin.
Oct 17	WS 779	Numbers 29:1-11	God accepted the sin offerings of the people in view of the sacrifice Christ would make on the cross.
Oct 18	TLH 549	Psalms 121	The Lord watches over His children day and night.
Oct 19	TLH 624; LSB 855	Proverbs 31:10-31	The Lord isn't laying out a "must do" list for godly women, but is showing that families are truly blessed through diligent wives and mothers.
Oct 20	TLH 267	Nahum 1:1-7	The cruel Assyrians were enemies of Judah, but at last they would be overcome, and God would judge them. Thus He would protect His people.
Oct 22	TLH 507	Acts 8:1-8	After Stephen's death, the church was persecuted and scattered, but God used it for good, causing the Word to be preached wherever the believers went!
Oct 23	TLH 531; LSB 667	Hebrews 12:1-13	The Lord trains us through hardship, so be encouraged by that—and also by all those who have endured the struggle before you.
Oct 24	TLH 415	Numbers 33:50-56	The Israelites learned that trusting the Lord they would be safe and inherit the land, but following their own ways would only lead them to ruin.
Oct 25	TLH 408; LSB 857	2 Chronicles 26:11-18	The Lord caused Uzziah King of Judah to become powerful and famous, but then pride overtook him and his life ended in affliction.
Oct 26	TLH 3; LSB 648	Psalms 122	We rejoice to join with others in the worship of the Lord and pray that believers everywhere may be at peace.
Oct 27	TLH 407; LSB 533	Ecclesiastes 2:17-26	Solomon learned that pursuing wisdom, pleasure, and work was meaningless apart from God. Only God gives meaning to everything we do.
Oct 29	TLH 392	Habakkuk 1:12-2:4	Habakkuk's complaint is age-old: "God, why do you tolerate the wicked?" God's answer, too, is age-old: The wicked will eventually perish, but you will live by faith.
Oct 30	WS 750	Acts 9:19b-31	After the Holy Spirit miraculously changed Saul's heart, he boldly spoke the word of the Lord. Our own baptisms effected a change no less miraculous!
Oct 31	TLH 269; LSB 659	Psalms 125	Those whose trust is in the Lord cannot be shaken by the enemies of God.

Reformation Roots

“Your past is waiting to inspire you.”

That is the intriguing tagline for a popular service which analyzes a person’s DNA in order to determine his ancestry. Have you tried it? Has a friend excitedly told you the results of her test? Does it really matter? Could the long-ago, dusty past really inspire you?

It might. You might discover that your ancestors include hardy Viking warriors or that you inherited your red hair from Irish royalty. It might help explain your love of adventure, determination, or drive. Your DNA is a connection to past generations and their accomplishments. It’s as though they laid the foundation on which you can continue building. So, yes, in that way the past can inspire the present.

Whether our DNA roots go back to Europe, Africa, or Asia, we trace our *Lutheran* roots back to Martin Luther and the Reformation. In many ways it has inspired our present. We have the Gospel treasure of justification in our churches today because of what Martin Luther did five centuries ago. Led by the Spirit, he put aside all the rituals, rules, and errors of the church which obscured the Gospel of Christ. He wasn’t deterred by the many threats made against him. He was determined to simply listen to the Lord in the Word.

That Word assured him that *“a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.”* (Galatians 2:16 NIV84) Sinners cannot possibly make themselves pleasing to God, no matter how sincere they may be or how hard they may try. But by faith, Jesus’ perfect obedience is credited to our account. He gives us His righteousness, while taking the world’s sin and condemnation upon Himself. Through Luther and other faithful servants, the good news has been passed down through the generations all the way to us.

Whether our DNA roots go back to Europe, Africa, or Asia, we trace our Lutheran roots back to Martin Luther and the Reformation. In many ways it has inspired our present.

Luther faced formidable enemies. Humanly speaking, there was no way he or those who followed him could expect to succeed. But they trusted God’s promise to be their *“refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”* (Psalm 46:1 NIV84) They took Jesus at His word when He said, *“Do not worry about your life . . . Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.”* (Matthew 6:25, 33 NIV84)

May the past inspire us. By outward appearance, things today do not look good for believers in Christ. Membership in Christian churches in America has been on a steady downward track for decades. The world is getting bolder in its attacks on those who dare to preach Jesus alone as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It is very possible that things will only get worse for our children and grandchildren.

But then remember our spiritual heritage. By God’s grace we come from a long line of believers stretching back not only to Martin Luther but to the apostles and the prophets and patriarchs before them. They, too, faced great obstacles and fierce enemies. Yet they, too, had the Lord beside them as their Savior and certain Hope for the future.

“Your past is waiting to inspire you” is actually not a new thought. The writer to the Hebrews, after recounting one example after another of believers, who by God’s grace courageously lived by faith, says to us, *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.”* (Hebrews 12:1-2 NIV84). May His redeeming sacrifice be our inspiration!



Michael Eichstadt is pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Hales Corners, Wisconsin, and president of the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

SEEN IN PASSING

Items of interest from various sources of religious news and opinion, in print and on the web.

Illinois Foiled in Attempt to Tax Church for Feeding Poor Children.

On July 18, the Circuit Court for Cook County, Illinois, ruled that the state Dept. of Employment Security couldn't tax Moody Bible Church for providing food and medicine to underprivileged children in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Chicago. After fifteen years of offering these free services—along with Bible stories and prayers—to neighborhood children after school, the state bureaucracy suddenly determined that such practical work (handing out food!) went beyond “strictly religious activities” and that the church should therefore be taxed. Thankfully, the court disagreed. Galus, Jeremiah. “Court Stops Bureaucrats Who Tried To Tax Christians For Feeding Poor Children.” *Religion. TheFederalist.com*, 8 Aug. 2018. Web. 12 Aug. 2018.

Churches “Re-Purposed” into Bars, Temples of Cheese.

Church attendance is declining and churches are closing all across North America. Dan Bilefsky, Canadian correspondent for the New York Times, noted that the problem is particularly acute in majority-Catholic French Canada. In the 1950's, 95% of the population went to Mass, while today only 5% do. 547 churches have closed in Quebec alone. That leaves a lot of buildings vacant, and buyers apparently have few scruples regarding the new uses to which they are willing to put the former churches. Churches have been transformed into bars, nightclubs, dance studios, restaurants and gyms. One former Catholic church in Sainte-Élizabeth-de-Warwick, a central Quebec town of four hundred people, became “La Fromagerie du Presbytere,” an internationally-known cheese factory. Bilefsky, Dan. “Where churches have become temples of cheese.” *World News. WRAL.com*, 30 Jul. 2018. Web. 14 Aug. 2018.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Minnesota Pastoral Conference

Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, Red Wing, Minnesota, October 2-3, 2018

Agenda:

- 500th Anniversary of the Heidelberg Disputation—Pastor David Baker
- What is the Kingdom of God? —Pastor David Schaller
- Biblical and Creedal Concept of “The Holy Spirit Proceeding from the Father”—Pastor Nathanael Mayhew

- Book Review: *A Christian Guide to Mental Illness*, by Stephen Saunders—Pastor Theodore Barthels
 - The Biblical View of Slavery—Pastor Joseph Naumann
 - Study of “Laying on of Hands”—Pastor James Albrecht
 - New Testament Exegesis (I Timothy 6:1-10)—Pastor George Dumann
 - Old Testament Exegesis (Habakkuk 2:6-20)—Pastor Robert Sauers
- Submitted by Pastor John Hein



“Amid the smoky skies and diminished air quality brought on by Pacific Northwest wildfires, St. John's Lutheran Church of Clarkston, Washington, provided the pure and clear Word of God to area children during their summer vacation Bible school.”