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LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

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



I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.

-- Psalm 130:5



Pages 10-11

IN THIS ISSUE December 2020 — VOL. 63 NO. 6

God's Advent TIMING	3	WHAT'S NEW WITH YOU	
Where Is John Pointing?.....	4	Messiah / Eau Claire	10-11
TLH 59, LSB 398		NOTES FROM THE FIELD	
"Hail to the Lord's Anointed"	5	Vorwärts!.....	12
When Non-Christians Out-Christian		ILC NEWSLETTER	13
the Christians.....	6	Bread of Life Readings, December 2020	14
A Living Faith Works.....	7	FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT	
WALTHER'S LAW AND GOSPEL		Give the Gift of Christmas.....	15
Introducing Law and Gospel	8	SEEN IN PASSING / ANNOUNCEMENTS.....	16
ERROR'S ECHO Docetism.....	9		

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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, Page 1 Printers; 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, John Pfeiffer, Nathan Pfeiffer, David Reim, Sam Rodebaugh, Michael Roehl, Robert Sauer, Thomas Schuetze, Chad Seybt, Mark Weis.

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God's Advent TIMING

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5)

There is, perhaps, nothing in this life that is more anticipated than the upcoming birth of a child. When it is your own son or daughter who is yet to be born, or that of a close relative or friend, you literally count the days until the baby will arrive. “Let’s see, the pregnancy began in July, that means (counting on fingers) . . . a February baby! Will the baby be early? I hope not too early! Or will the baby be late?” Finally, the baby always comes when good and ready—when it is God’s time. A joyful birth announcement then follows, with all the particulars about the name, parents, weight and length, and the date of birth.

Throughout the world, this miracle of newborn life happens about 350,000 times each day. Does each one of these worldwide births capture your personal anticipation and attention? Of course not. Out of all the billions of births that have taken place throughout history, there has been only one that has universal, heartfelt meaning. That is the birth of God’s only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. From the beginning of history, the Lord began to fill in the “birth announcement” for His Son, revealing more and more details about how this birth would take place. These included His human and divine parentage, His royal lineage, His redeeming work, and His death and resurrection.

One conspicuous blank on the heavenly birth announcement was the exact time of the arrival of the Son of God. The date of the birth of the Messiah remained a mystery for many long centuries. And then, at long last and in God’s good time, His promises were all fulfilled in every prophetic detail. Today, we are truly blessed to have the

whole story right in our Bibles, including the time that God selected to fulfill His promises. All that remains now is the anticipation of another, even more glorious announcement.

When Jesus comes again in glory, He will judge the world in righteousness, condemning the unbelieving to eternal torment, but inviting the adopted children of God to their heavenly home. We already know the Who concerning this event, as well as the what—all that remains is, once again, the when; for the Savior Himself said, “*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.*” (Matthew 24:36)

Of all the billions of births that have taken place throughout history, there has been only one that has universal, heartfelt meaning.

In many places the Bible urges us to be ready for Jesus’ arrival at any moment. By God’s grace, we certainly will be ready, for we know that “in the fullness of time” God kept all of His past promises concerning Jesus’ first arrival. Because of His complete record of faithfulness thus far, we can confidently say with the Apostle Paul, “*The Lord will deliver me from every evil*

work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!” (2 Timothy 4:18)

If you were to receive a birth announcement for every child born today, each on a single sheet of paper, it would take 70 cases of paper to announce each of the 350,000 births. How many of them will receive, by faith, the “adoption as sons” of God? We can’t know that number, but we do know it is our blessed privilege to proclaim the announcement of this Savior to as many as will hear. We also know that our long wait is a blessed one, for the sake of those who will yet come to know Him. Like the arrival of God’s own Son in Bethlehem of long ago, His glorious second coming will surely happen “*in the fullness of time!*”



Bruce Naumann is senior pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Where is John Pointing?

Have you experienced the frustration that comes when you try to point at something exciting, only for your audience to miss it? This happens frequently in my family when we're on the road. I will see something that I want my young children to see as well. I will point and exclaim, "Look over there!" And my boys will be staring at my hand instead. I will more vigorously thrust my pointed finger back and forth to get them to look in that direction while their eyes will follow the movement of my hand and miss the moment entirely. Toddlers will do this. Don't adults sometimes do the same?

When God sent John the Baptist, at that particular moment in history, to point out the Messiah, it is apparent that many people were stuck staring at the hand instead. However, God speaks very clearly through the Apostle John that John the Baptist *"was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light."* (John 1:8) Perhaps some people thought that the voice crying in the wilderness was the Lord Himself, rather than the one preparing the way for the Lord. Later, when Jesus asked His disciples who people thought He was, the disciples acknowledged, *"Some say John the Baptist."* (Matthew 16:14) It appears that many people were missing John's point.

As we begin another Advent season, we will all be circling back to the familiar pre-Christmas readings. But if our preparations for Christmas only skim the narrative surface of angel encounters and glad tidings, we might miss the point as well. Instead, let's head out to the wilderness and listen to what John has to say. *"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'"* (Matthew 3:1-2)

Although we might not think of it in this way, the season

of Advent is very similar to the season of Lent. Both are intended to be times of repentance. To use this Advent wisely, we must first take a good, long look in the mirror of God's Law. There we find that even in this most joyous time of year, we have nothing to be joyful about—nothing that we can find in ourselves, anyway. Measuring ourselves against God's lofty standards, we realize that we are hopelessly entrenched in our sinful inclinations. But true repentance involves not only sorrow over sin; we must then also follow the forerunner's pointing finger to see where it leads. He is directing us to *"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29) In Christ you may find peace, knowing that He has removed your sins as well.

The season of Advent is very similar to the season of Lent. Both are intended to be times of repentance.

It's interesting that before John was born, the angel announced the boy's birth, saying, *"Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John."* (Luke 1:13) Zacharias and his wife,

Elizabeth, were well along in years; in addition, Elizabeth was barren. And while we can't eliminate the possibility that Zacharias was praying for a son, we do know that, as a priest, he was praying for his people. Daily he focused his eyes on the coming Savior and prayed for Israel's consolation. God's answer? A son who would be born with hand outstretched toward the new day of salvation.

Follow where his finger points, keeping your eyes focused on the same. Know that *"your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation."* (Zechariah 9:9)



Samuel Rodebaugh is pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Winter Haven, Florida.

TLH 59, LSB 398

“Hail to the Lord’s Anointed”

In the Old Testament, the kings of Israel were anointed to their office. We read of how Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon as king by pouring oil on his head (1 Kings 1:34, 39). This ceremony of anointing publicly identified Solomon as the one whom God Himself had chosen and endowed with the Holy Spirit to be the ruler of His people.

The anointing of Israel’s kings also served an even more important purpose. It pictured something about the coming of the promised Savior. His titles of *Messiah* (Hebrew) and *Christ* (Greek) mean “the Anointed One,” God’s own choice to be the world’s Redeemer.

Psalms 72, attributed to Solomon, foretells the coming of this Anointed One, God’s own Son, the good and righteous King sent to conquer the enemies of the devil, sin, and death and to rule in the hearts of His believing people. The psalm prophesies the glory of His universal and everlasting reign.

This great psalm moved English poet James Montgomery (1771-1854) to write the hymn “Hail to the Lord’s Anointed.” It is perhaps the best of a collection of his Psalm-based hymns titled *Songs of Zion* (1823, available online at archive.org).

It is a hymn fitting for the season of Advent, for it announces the arrival of the Savior foretold in the psalm and greets Him as the Lord’s Anointed. It gives us a powerful description of Christ’s kingdom, with details drawn from the psalm.

The hymn hails the appearance of the long-expected Christ “when the fullness of time had come” (Galatians 4:4).
**Hail to the Lord’s Anointed / Great David’s greater Son!
/ Hail in the time appointed / His reign on earth begun!**

The Messiah King is no respecter of persons. He brings deliverance to the poor of the people and the children of the needy. And this is not just the giving of daily bread, but especially the deliverance of the soul from sin and death.
To give them songs for sighing / Their darkness turn to



**light, / Whose souls, condemned and dying /
Were precious in His sight.**

The blessings of the Messiah are described in terms of rain that produces a bountiful harvest.
**He shall come down like showers / Upon the
fruitful earth, / And joy and hope, like flowers,
/ Spring in His path to birth.**

King Messiah’s reign extends to all parts of the world and to people of every ethnic group. **Arabia’s desert ranger / To
Him shall bow the knee. / The Ethiopian stranger / His
glory come to see.** It extends even to those in the highest places. **Kings shall bow down before Him / And gold and
incense bring; / All nations shall adore Him, / His praise
all people sing.**

Unlike earthly rulers, the Christ will reign forever. No one will be able to overthrow Him and His kingdom. The passage of time which means decline for the kings of this world will mean only increase in Messiah’s kingdom as more and more people hear the Gospel and come to believe in Him and praise Him as Lord and Savior. **O’er every foe
victorious / He on His throne shall rest, / From age to age
more glorious / All blessing and all-blest.**

The assurance that Christ’s reign will never end gives us hope and confidence for this life and the life to come. The forgiveness of sins that Christ won for us by His sacrifice on the cross and the eternal life that is ours because of His resurrection are gifts that will not be taken from us. **The
tide of time shall never / His covenant remove; / His name
shall stand forever, /--That name to us is Love.**

Our hymnals have paired this hymn with a stirring melody by Lutheran church musician Leonhart Schroeter (1540-1602), who composed it for a Christmas hymn. It is a fitting tune for us to sing to welcome and praise our Lord

as we celebrate His coming into the world to save us.



John Klatt is a retired pastor. He lives in Watertown, South Dakota.

When Non-Christians Out-Christian the Christians

“But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep. So the captain came to him, and said to him, ‘What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.’” (Jonah 1:4-6)

It was Jonah’s fault.

God had commanded him to go preach repentance to the wicked Ninevites, and Jonah’s response had been to board a ship going in the opposite direction. So the Lord sent a fierce storm that threatened to sink the boat. The sailors, idolaters all, were at least doing *something*—they were lightening the ship and praying to their false gods. But Jonah, the prophet of Jehovah, the only true believer aboard? Not so much. He had given up, and was sleeping in the ship’s hold. To his shame, believing Jonah actually had to be rebuked by the ship’s unbelieving captain for neglecting his prayers!

Unbelievers sometimes put believers to shame.

How sad when this situation is replicated in our lives! How shameful when the idolater is more faithful in his prayers than the worshiper of the true God, when the atheist is more cheerful and welcoming than the child of God, when the non-Christian shows more love for his neighbor than the Christian does! *These things ought not so to be.*

God does what it takes to bring us back.

Thankfully, when our sinful impulses, like Jonah’s, try to take us in the opposite direction from God’s path for us, our gracious Lord will bring us back. And the more extreme the departure, the more extreme His measures often are for saving us from ourselves—up to and including being swallowed by a great fish! When one of His precious sheep is lost, our loving Good Shepherd searches diligently for it, “*and when he has found it, he*

lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’” (Luke 15:5-6)

God has designed it so that the Gospel works even when we don’t.

How wonderful it is that, even when we are faithless, God remains faithful! His Word continues to go out, according to His holy will, and never returns to Him void (Isaiah 55:11). Even in the mouths of weak witnesses and reluctant prophets, the Gospel continues to work powerfully to bring souls to faith. God saw to it that Jonah—against his will!—witnessed the sovereignty, power, and salvation of the only true God; both to the heathen sailors and the heathen Ninevites. Both groups were brought to repentance. Many were saved through the witness of Jonah, however grudgingly that witness was given.

But why be grudging?

When it comes to the Gospel, let’s be cheerful and generous givers! No matter to whom you may be speaking—the neighbor across the fence, the coworker in the break room, the person on the next elliptical at the gym—you have *exactly* what that person needs most in life. The Holy Spirit has opened your eyes to the wonderful reality of the Gospel—that God forgives sins freely for Christ’s sake. Won’t you share that reality with others? There’s no greater gift you could possibly give!

Meanwhile, don’t let the non-Christians out-Christian the Christians. Let’s be constant in prayer, always reflecting our Savior’s love, and abounding in the good works by which, Christ says, His followers will easily be identified. “*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” (John 13:35)



Paul Naumann is a professor at Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and editor of the *Lutheran Spokesman*.

A Living Faith Works

“But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

(James 2:20-26)

Imagine standing in a hospital room next to the body of a loved one who has recently passed away. The hospital machines all show that her brain, lungs, and heart have stopped functioning, and there’s even discoloration of the skin indicating the blood has stopped flowing. When the doctor walks in, you assume he has come to officially pronounce the time of death. Instead, he tries to assure you that your relative, obviously deceased, is still living and will be okay! Some doctor!

The foolishness of this scenario concerning physical life is similar to the foolishness James addresses concerning spiritual life. There are those who would suggest that saving faith is nothing more than saying a few words and going through a few motions. They believe that as long as they know the right script to speak on Judgment Day, then God will let them into heaven. Like the foolish doctor above, they want to claim there is life where no signs of life exist.

In contrast, James produces real-life examples of living faith in the hearts of believers Abraham and Rahab. In so doing, James teaches us the signs—the pulse and life breath—of a living faith. The outward good works which Abraham and Rahab produced were evidence of the faith that, by God’s grace, was alive and well in their hearts.

The living faith that justifies man before God is not a mere head knowledge of certain facts and a regurgitation of certain words. That kind of faith is dead because it is not founded on Christ and His merit, but rather it is founded

on what the sinner can learn and say. It’s altogether a shallow, shoddy, man-made faith in the sinner’s own self-righteousness. Instead, living faith works good without even thinking about such works, and certainly without placing trust in them.

What James teaches here is taught in other places of Scripture as well. In Matthew 7, Jesus says, “Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.” (Matthew 17:17-18) James was addressing those who would like to be a good tree and a bad tree at the same time. They want to be considered as Christians, “good trees,” but they still want to be able to produce their “bad fruit,” the sinful desires of their flesh and the sins they produce. But Jesus says, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (verse 19) Or as James puts it, “faith without works is dead.”

The presence of a pulse may indicate life in a person, but it is not the source of that life. No, our hearts beat because God gives us life. Just as good works are not the source of our faith, God is. The point then is that if a person is alive, his heart will be beating. For a person who has saving faith in Jesus alone for salvation, that faith animated by God’s grace and mercy through the Gospel will then simply live. May the Holy Spirit keep us in such a living, saving faith in our living Savior Jesus. Amen!



Chad Seybt is pastor of Morning Star Lutheran Church in Fairchild, Wisconsin, Trinity Lutheran Church in Millston, Wisconsin, and Peace with God Evangelical Lutheran Church in Onalaska, Wisconsin.

WALTHER'S LAW AND GOSPEL

One of the hallmarks of the Lutheran Church is its proper understanding and application of the Bible's two main teachings—Law and Gospel. Dr. C.F.W. Walther's seminal work *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* is the basis for this two-year series.



Introducing *Law and Gospel*

Most Christians around the world have heard of Martin Luther, the German theologian who took a stand against the Roman Catholic Church and ushered in the Reformation in Europe. Three centuries later, another German theologian, Dr. C.F.W. Walther, led in the development of confessional Lutheranism in the United States. The *Lutheran Spokesman* is beginning a two-year series on the book for which Walther is chiefly known, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*. Although it was published over 130 years ago, it may be even more important today than it was then in helping people to understand the two great Bible doctrines. It is our hope that the study of this work will be a blessing in your faith walk.

C.F.W. Walther

Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther was born in Langenchursdorf, Saxony, in 1811. The eighth child of his parents, he came from three previous generations of Lutheran ministers. Despite being raised in a God-fearing home, later in life he confessed that as a boy he was uneducated in Scripture and likely not a Christian. He studied theology with his brother Otto at the University of Leipzig. While there he contracted a serious lung disease that laid him up for six months. During that time, he read the works of Martin Luther and found himself in agreement with him on doctrine. He was ordained as pastor in Braunsdorf, Saxony in 1837.

Because the philosophies of Rationalism (Biblical truth subjected to human reason) and Unionism (overlooking doctrinal differences for the sake of outward unity) had infested the local university and government, Walther joined a group intent on gaining religious freedom by emigrating to the United States. Led by Martin Stephan, about eight hundred Saxon Lutherans arrived in New Orleans in early 1839. The group soon headed north and settled in both Perry County, Missouri, and St. Louis.

In 1841, Walther married Emilie Buenger (1812-1885). The couple was blessed with six children. That same year he accepted a call as pastor of his late brother Otto's congregation, Trinity Lutheran, in St. Louis. He participated in the Altenburg Debate, in which he was able to convince the Saxon Lutherans that their church was

legitimate, which prevented disorganization and division amongst them.

Like Luther, Walther wore many hats and seemed to be involved in everything. He was the pastor of four congregations. He helped found Concordia Seminary in 1839 and later relocated it to St. Louis. He was a founder and first president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in 1847. He served in that capacity twice (1847-1850, 1864-1878). He was a professor and president of Concordia Seminary from 1850-1887. In 1872 he played a key role in the development of the Synodical Conference, a group united in doctrine composed of the Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Missouri, and Norwegian synods.

Walther's Writing

In his writing, Walther vigorously opposed non-Lutheran doctrine. He dealt with several doctrinal controversies both in Germany and the United States, including pietism and the doctrine of election. Taking a Biblical stand did not always make him popular. He was responsible for the creation of two influential Lutheran periodicals, *Der Lutheraner* (1844) and *Lehre und Wehre* (1855). He established Concordia Publishing House in 1869. He even dabbled in poetry and music, composing the text and tune of the Easter hymn, "He's Risen, He's Risen."

Many of Walther's books were published posthumously, including his most well-read book, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*. On Friday evenings at Concordia Seminary, Walther gave lectures on a variety of religious topics. These lectures were very popular with seminary students as well as the public. The lectures he gave in 1884-1885 were focused on the doctrines of Law and Gospel. Walther developed twenty-five theses on the topic, which he presented over the course of thirty-nine lectures. Each thesis was defended by extensive Scriptural exegesis. These lectures, as recorded in the stenographic notes of Rev. Th. Claus, were first published in German in 1895. The English

version is W.H.T. Dau's translation of the German.

Joe Lau is a professor at Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.



[To read Walther's Law and Gospel for free on-line, and to access related Bible class materials, go to www.ilc.edu/Walther/]

ERROR'S ECHO

In this series we take a look back at some of the most notorious errors and heresies that have threatened the church over the centuries, as well as the subtle (and not so subtle) ways in which those false teachings continue to haunt 21st century thought and theology.

Docetism

On one occasion while in the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus posed this vital question to His disciples: “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (Matthew 16:13) The answers reported were many and varied—and wrong. The question continued to be answered throughout history in various strange and surprising ways.

When we present the true and Biblical identity of Christ in our modern world, we are most often compelled to defend the true divinity of Jesus, the God-man, against skeptical attacks. No one much questions His true humanity. This was not the case in the early church of the ancient world. Nor always in our modern world, as we will see.

The basic belief of docetism (from a Greek word meaning “seem” or “appear,”) is that Jesus seemed truly human, but really wasn’t. The more extreme docetists considered Jesus a mere phantom, without a real body. Others conceded that Jesus had some sort of heavenly, non-natural body. Still others believed that a man (Jesus) was inhabited at his birth or Baptism by a divine spirit being (Christ) and then abandoned just before His passion.

We cannot point with any certainty to a single individual as the originator of these strange notions. No sect took this name or championed this heresy as their distinguishing mark. Rather these ideas were somewhat widely spread, wherever gnosticism arose, or a false piety sought to protect Jesus from what they thought was the contamination of fleshliness. These notions troubled the early church for centuries. This heresy was expressly condemned at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, the same council that gave us the Nicene Creed.

Why would the church care about such things? Sure, it’s a weird belief system, but is there any real harm if someone buys into it? Yes, indeed! Deadly harm! One early church father summed it up this way: “[If] Christ’s flesh is now discovered to be a lie, it follows that all things which were done by the flesh of Christ were done untruly.” If Christ did not truly die, there is no real redemption, no actual

atonement, no physical resurrection, and “*your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*” (1 Corinthians 15:17) John warned that to deny that Jesus has come in the flesh is to have the spirit of antichrist.

Sadly, docetism still has appeal.

Christian Science, the invention of Mary Baker Eddy, teaches that sickness and death are illusions. She said, “Disease is an experience of a so-called mortal mind. It is fear made manifest on the body.” “Spirit is the real and eternal; matter is the unreal and temporal.” “Health is not a condition of matter, but of Mind.” Whatever that means, it denies the material world as we understand it.

New Age practitioners exalt our supposed divinity within at the expense of our material reality. The climax of a bestseller from a while ago, *The Celestine Prophecy*, has people simply disappearing into a higher reality after altering the material realities of their lives by the power of their mind.

There are mainstream theologians who cheerfully jettison the physical resurrection of Jesus, arguing that this event happened outside of human history. His truly human experience for us and in our place is not seen as vital.

Even the birth of Christ is touched by docetic views when it is believed by some that His was not a natural birth, but that He simply passed through the womb and skin enclosing Him, like a ghost through walls.

We live in a material world, and our Savior fully entered into that world for us. To separate Him from that existence is to deny that He is our Brother. The message of Christmas is then lost, for Jesus is no longer Immanuel, God with us.



Norman Greve is pastor of St. Peter’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in Iron River, Michigan.

WHAT'S NEW WITH YOU?

Updates from congregations around the church of the Lutheran Confession

Messiah Lutheran Church— Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Does anyone else feel as if 2020 has lasted longer than a year? During the spring we canceled everything. In the summer we waited—and THEN canceled everything. But thankfully there have been some restarts along the way.

Here at Messiah Lutheran we had three months (mid-March to mid-June) when all in-person worship services were canceled. If you had asked me a year ago if that could happen, I would have said you were crazy! Half of Lent, Holy Week, and Resurrection Sunday worship services could be seen only online. The offsite services that we hold at a number of local nursing homes were canceled. Volunteers scrambled to provide the “wholesome loaves that people need” (Worship Supplement 781) for our members and all those who gather to hear the Word at our preaching stations.

With some difficulty, and constant change, we have now eased back into in-person worship. In the summer we tried some outdoor services on Saturdays up on the playground hill. It worked a few times, but weather and other factors made this option always uncertain. After a Confirmation Sunday with limited attendance (parents and family of the confirmands), in-person worship was once again opened for all to attend. In-person Bible Class followed soon after that, and just recently Sunday School restarted also.

A recent sermon series was titled “Even Better Blessings.” We studied times when people came asking Jesus for one thing, but He ended up giving them something much better. Looking back, I can see God blessing us during



Top: outdoor worship during the COVID crisis. Above: “socially distanced” confirmation at Messiah.

this COVID-time. We used to upload service videos to the internet. Due to necessity, services are now live-streamed and archived each Sunday. Our Bible classes weren’t available online before, but now they also are live-streamed, and people can even interact from home through texting and *YouTube* messaging. We still have technical difficulties sometimes, but our Technology Committee takes care of them quickly. Remember to say a prayer of thanks for workers like these who quietly make things possible from the back corners of our sanctuaries.

Sadly, both sessions of our in-person Vacation Bible School were canceled this summer. God’s Kids Bible Camp was also canceled. GKBC is a sleep-over camp meant to serve kids in the community who wouldn’t otherwise be able to afford a summer camp. With this camp, though, they get



Some of the young people who participated in the camping trip to Porcupine Mountains State Park.

not only a summer camp experience, but also JESUS. Pray that next summer this outreach effort can continue.

At the beginning of August our youth group (and others from our sister congregations in Minnesota) traveled to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan for a camping trip. High School participants went to the group campsite, and college campers hiked into the backcountry of Porcupine Mountains State Park. Although all campers were tested prior to the outset of the trip, along the way some of our campers ended up getting COVID, so there was a flurry of activity when we got home to make sure we were reporting, getting tested, and quarantining—all in the proper way. Thankfully, those who got sick recovered without great difficulty, and afterwards all were glad they went.

While there, the high school campers studied a series called “Entitled to Work.” This series was about fighting our sense of entitlement to things that God doesn’t really guarantee, and instead putting energy into the Kingdom work of proclaiming the Gospel.

The college backpackers studied the life of Joseph in the Old Testament. When Joseph was at the top of a wave in his life, he gave God the credit. When he was at a low spot, he recognized that God was still with him, and would wait for the Lord to bring about His will. It’s amazing how God’s Word continues to speak directly to our situation—from thousands of years ago! Thank you, Lord.

Soon we’ll be starting up in-person “Ruth’s Retreat” again. This is a relaxed Bible study held at the home of Ruth Gullerud near the campus of Immanuel Lutheran High School and College. We hope also to restart “In His Word,” a Bible study held on the campus of the University

of Wisconsin—Eau Claire, for those of college age. We hope that our Youth Group events will also restart soon.

One fear that I think many had when worship services were canceled back in March was that without the collection plate being passed, our offerings would decrease, requiring cuts to programs and wages. This just hasn’t happened at Messiah, and we thank the Lord for this blessing. While we do not know what the future holds, we do know Who holds the future. With that in mind, we have been working on a building project to enlarge Messiah Lutheran School in order to reduce crowding and to have a dedicated classroom for every grade. What a blessing that would be! In this current time of social distancing, our classrooms have been completely reassigned in order to fit our students in (119 total) while maintaining the proper distances. This has required grades 5-6 to move to the fellowship hall (we now view Bible class from chairs put between their classroom desks). Grades 7-8 are camped out in the sanctuary. Like everything lately, this has taken a lot of planning, meeting, and working—but how blessed we are to have this work!

We’re not the ancient Israelites, and we’re not backed up against the Red Sea. But Moses’ words to that frightened people still speak to us today: “*The LORD will fight for you; you need only be still.*” (Exodus 14:14 NIV84) Maybe 2021 will be canceled too. Or we’ll have to learn how to wait some more. One thing is certain, if we wait on the Lord, we won’t be disappointed. Much love to all of you, in Christ Jesus our Savior.



Caleb Schaller is an associate pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Vorwärts!

As we approach Christmas, we remember that it is always the season of giving, especially giving of the Word of God to all. The Lord Himself said that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Our small church body seeks to go forward in this. All four of the Gospels end with the idea of the forward movement of the Word of life.

In German, the word *vorwärts* means “forward.” This is what we in our church body seek to do, to go forward with the Word of Life. Below you have the timeline which indicates increasing efforts. No names mentioned; it is His Work and we are His unworthy servants. To God alone belongs the glory.

- 1960 - When the CLC began, we found ourselves with a mission in Japan. Though in 1974 they withdrew from us, we would be delighted to again work in Japan.
- 1974 - In Nigeria we began our African mission effort, which has expanded throughout the dark continent since then. We bring the Light of Christ.
- 1983 - We began to work in India with what came to be called the Church of the Lutheran Confession of India (CLCI). It began in Andhra Pradesh State and expanded. It is as of 2020 our second-largest mission with around twelve thousand souls served by over five hundred pastors in twelve districts.
- 1984 - We began work in India’s Tamil Nadu State. We continue with an ever-growing fellowship of brethren in the Berea Evangelical Lutheran Church (BELC). This is, as of 2020, our largest mission, with over 36,000 souls served by nearly eight hundred pastors.
- 1998 - After the disastrous civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, we began work there. After some years, the original leader withdrew from us. This did not deter those still in fellowship from expanding the work even over the border into Zambia.
- 1999 - This year saw us begin work in northern Thailand. This work lasted until 2005. Now the potential exists for a resumption of outreach there.
- 2000 - This was a very eventful year seeing us begin work in Ghana, Kenya and Tanzania.

- 2001 - Togo work began and has since expanded, with an outreach to Benin.
- 2007 - Nepal work began this year and has continued to expand from its nucleus.
- 2008 - Myanmar work began in the Yangon area as well as in Chin State.
- 2009 - While there had been earlier outreach attempts from Kenya to Uganda, it was in this year that the effort in those areas became full-fledged.
- 2010 - This year we recognized not only the two efforts from different directions into Zambia, but also outreach into Malawi.
- 2012 - This year saw work in Mexico, which continues in two areas.
- 2015 - Visits began to Liberia, which became a full mission effort. And from Liberia there is now outreach to Guinea.
- 2019 - Groundwork has already been done in Laos and Vietnam, which may give us an opportunity to enter those countries, as well as to re-enter Thailand. Teaching meetings with pastors have steadily expanded in these countries over several years.
- 2020 - This year has seen fellowship established with a pastor and the small Lutheran church body he leads in Bangladesh. Contacts continue with a congregation in Zanzibar as well as email correspondence and online courses with individuals in ten other countries. And the year is not yet concluded!

Only the Lord knows how He will lead us to more forward movement with His precious Word to souls in great need. In prayer remember how we with our overseas brethren are contending against Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism to bring the Light of Life in Christ’s forgiveness gained on the cross. So *vorwärts!* It is not just a word, but a call to action under the leadership of our Master, the Christ.



David Koenig has served as a foreign missionary in Africa, India, and elsewhere. Though officially retired, he continues to be active in the synod’s mission endeavors.

Committee on Domestic Fields

The front page of the lutheranmissions.org website states well our primary goal on the Board of Missions. “We are here to speak the truth of the Gospel. We believe that it is our loving duty to God and our fellow men to promote and spread this same message to every corner of the globe, in order that all men might hear, believe, and receive salvation.” We accomplish this through our support of our overseas missions and our five domestic mission congregations. We also seek to equip all of our CLC congregations to carry out this mission in their own local setting. This is the primary work of the Committee on Domestic Fields (CDF).

At the end of 2019, the CDF shared an eight-part series in which they used the catechism as a manual for congregational evangelism. This year, they completed a

“Starting a Preaching Station” checklist to help those congregations who are thinking about or are in the process of starting a preaching station.

Most recently, they have produced a Bible study video series on the Great Commission. The series is designed to be shared in five sessions. There is one video per session,

with discussion questions paired with each video. Each video is roughly thirty minutes in length and addresses a specific topic involving mission work in light of the Great Commission. Following each video, the pastor or lay leader guides the group through a fifteen-minute discussion using the questions provided as a framework. The five topics are

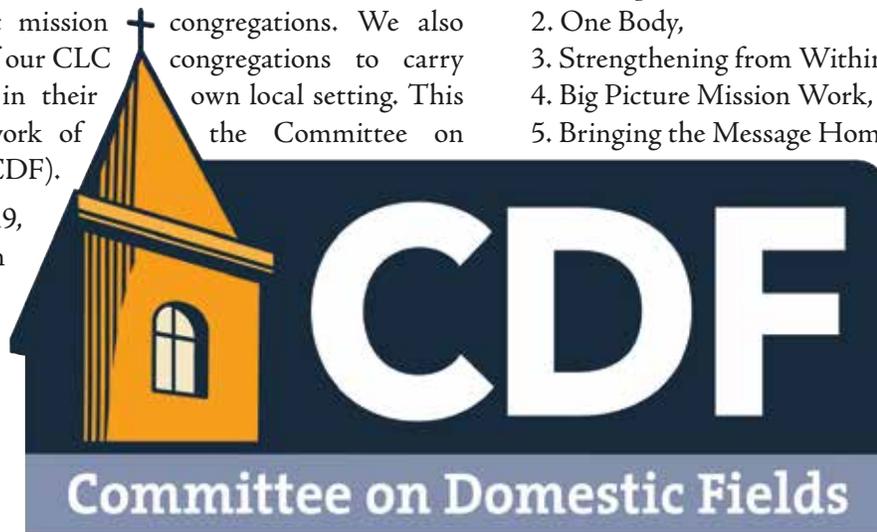
1. A Gospel Commission,
2. One Body,
3. Strengthening from Within,
4. Big Picture Mission Work, and
5. Bringing the Message Home.

This series has been shared with the pastors of the CLC to assist them in encouraging mission work in their congregations.

Also this fall, the CDF released a Mission Festival packet with a prepared bulletin including a service liturgy, Scripture readings, and

even a sample sermon. They are also working on putting together guidelines for starting a congregation and are looking to revamp the domestic missions website.

The members of the CDF are Pastor Mark Tiefel (chairman), Pastor Tom Naumann, Pastor David Ude, Nathan Noeldner, and Tim Schaser. Much of the work the CDF has done can be accessed from the CLC domestic missions website: <http://us.lutheranmissions.org>. We thank the CDF for their work and pray that the Lord would bless all of our congregations as we seek to carry out our role in the Great Commission.



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

“BREAD OF LIFE” READINGS DECEMBER 2020

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

Date	Hymns	Reading	Comments
Dec 1	TLH 75 (LSB 354)	1 Kings 21:1-29	“There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD. . . .” Yet when he humbled himself before the Lord, the Lord held off on His immediate judgment. What mercy! You too will find that He is merciful.
Dec 2	TLH 289	1 Kings 22:1-28	Four hundred false prophets vs. one true prophet. Whose word do you think will be right? Remember that just because “everyone” says it, that doesn’t make it true. Only God’s Word is always true.
Dec 3	TLH 61 (LSB 347)	1 Kings 22:29-44	Micaiah was right because his word was from the Lord. Ahab was killed while faithful Jehoshaphat became king in Judah.
Dec 4	TLH 645 (LSB 359)	Revelation 14:1-5	After pictures of troubles comes a glorious vision of triumph! The believers, blameless and cleansed through Christ, will join Him in glory singing praises that only Spirit-filled hearts can sing! (144,000 symbolizes totality.)
Dec 5	TLH 609 (LSB 516)	Revelation 14:6-13	When Judgment Day comes, those who have died in the Lord will never be tormented by any punishment or trials, but they will find rest for their souls forever.
Dec 7	TLH 56 (LSB 353)	Revelation 14:14-20	Sometimes it can seem to us as if wickedness will last forever, but a reckoning for all wickedness and evil is coming. Jesus will judge the earth, and righteousness will win out.
Dec 8	TLH 275	Amos 8:1-12	The people of Israel demonstrated their unbelief by their dishonesty and by taking unfair advantage of the poor. For their unbelief, the Lord would take even His Word away from them.
Dec 9	TLH 72 (LSB 515)	Amos 9:5-15	“Yet I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,” the Lord said. Why not? Because a Savior was still to come from Jacob’s line. A remnant of believers would remain. After chapters of judgment, Amos closes with hope and forgiveness.
Dec 10	WS 702	Revelation 15:1-8	The Lord God Almighty is holy and righteous. He is greater than all, and none of His enemies can win the victory over Him. Eventually, they will all recognize this. Our God is “King of the ages.”
Dec 11	TLH 57 (LSB 335)	Revelation 16:1-21	This is a vision of the Lord’s victory over the Antichrist and his people, those who kill the prophets, all who refuse to repent, the false prophets, and those who side with demons. They are all defeated!
Dec 12	TLH 93; LSB 355	2 Kings 1:1-18	We just can’t turn to other gods and other religions and expect good results. Ahaziah found that out the hard way. The Lord alone is our fortress. He alone is our help in time of need.
Dec 14	TLH 272 (LSB 346)	2 Kings 2:1-18	Elijah was taken away, but God replaced him with another prophet—a prophet who had the same authority and power that Elijah had.
Dec 15	TLH 285	2 Kings 3:1-25	Haven’t we seen this movie before? Once again Jehoshaphat of Judah seeks out the Lord when facing battle. Once again the word of the Lord’s prophet is proved right, for God’s Word never fails.
Dec 16	TLH 62 (LSB 357)	Revelation 17:3-14	Babylon was noteworthy for its sinful luxuries and moral corruption. Here, Babylon the Prostitute represents the center of opposition to God. Historically, Rome and the Roman Church have been the center of opposition to the Gospel.
Dec 17	TLH 73 (LSB 340)	Revelation 18:1-20	The kingdom of Babylon will be thrown down. The pomp and power of Rome and the church of Antichrist was dealt a blow with the Reformation 500 years ago and in the end will fall for good.
Dec 18	TLH 83; LSB 365	2 Kings 4:1-7	“Ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few.” That is, “Trust that God can do great things.” After all, He sent His only Son to be born a humble infant. How great is that!
Dec 19	TLH 58 (WS 704)	2 Kings 5:1-19	God’s Word is powerful. “Wash and be cleansed!” the Word said—and Naaman was. “Go in peace,” the Word says to you—and you do, with sins forgiven.
Dec 21	TLH 102 (WS 708)	Obadiah 1:1-21	Edom (Esau’s descendants) were enemies of Judah (Jacob’s descendants). The Lord promised that Edom would fall and Judah would return from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem—in plenty of time for Jesus to be born near there.
Dec 22	TLH 71	2 Kings 6:1-7	The lost axhead was a crisis for the prophet who was trying to help build the prophets’ new meeting place. With a miracle we are then reminded how the Lord is concerned for and cares for those who trust in Him.
Dec 23	TLH 77 (LSB 360)	Revelation 19:1-5	Hallelujah! The Lord God reigns, and His enemies are overcome forever!
Dec 24	TLH 67 (LSB 514)	Revelation 19:6-10	Hallelujah! From cradle to cross to crown Jesus is our Savior. We will join the wedding supper of the Lamb, for all our sins have been washed away.
Dec 25	WS 707 (LSB 377)	Psalms 98	God has remembered us! His own Son has become one of us—to live and die as one of us; to raise us from death to life. Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Dec 26	TLH 88; LSB 366	Revelation 19:11-20:6	On this day the church remembers the martyr Stephen (Acts 7). Those who fight against the children of God will be judged by our Lord Jesus Christ. The righteous reign with Him.
Dec 28	WS 709 (LSB 392)	Revelation 20:7-13	Satan is doomed, but our names are written in the book of life. Thanks be to God!
Dec 29	WS 710 (LSB 376)	Revelation 21:1-8	At the judgment, the redeemed in Christ will enjoy an everlasting life of glory without sorrow or pain, separated from all evil and evildoers.
Dec 30	WS 794 (LSB 673)	Revelation 21:9-27	Heaven is symbolized here by Jerusalem, the Holy City. The new earth and sky will be the most beautiful place we can imagine, a perfect world with no sin and none of sin’s effects.
Dec 31	WS 800 (LSB 922)	Revelation 22:1-21	When will our Lord come again? When will all this glory and beauty be ours? “Behold, I am coming quickly!” He says. Come, O Root and Offspring of David! Come, O bright Morning Star!

Give the Gift of Christmas

Does it seem harder each year to find just the right Christmas gift for the people on your list? You can't repeat the great idea you had last year. Everything seems more expensive this time around. Maybe there are a few more grandchildren or other family members to buy for than in years past. And what do you get for someone who seemingly already has everything?

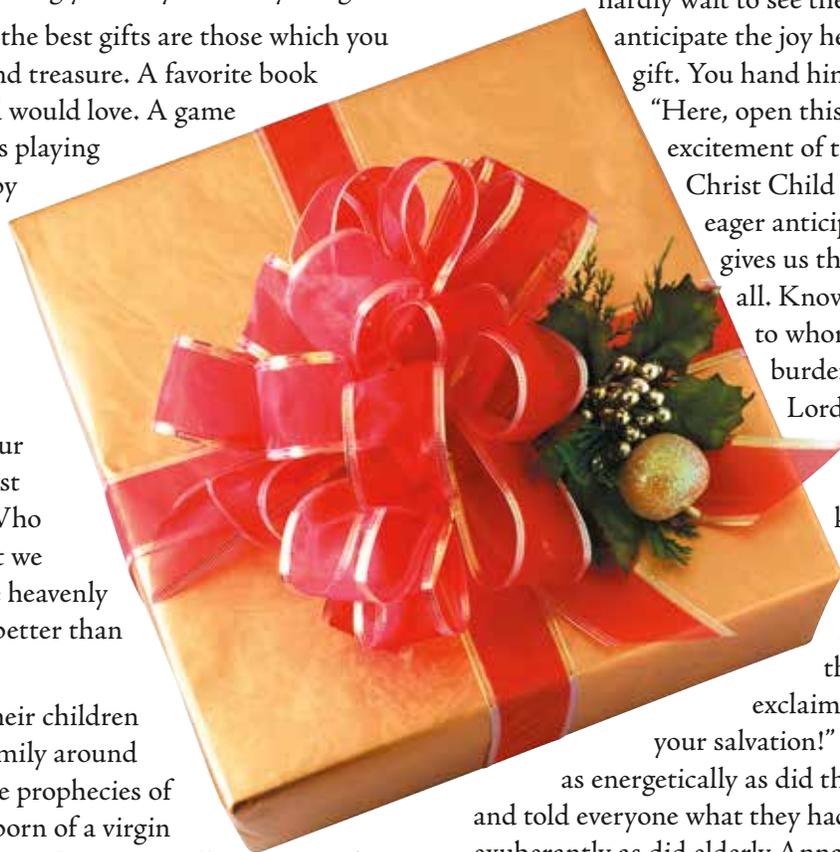
It turns out that often the best gifts are those which you yourself have received and treasure. A favorite book may be one that a friend would love. A game your whole family enjoys playing could likely be enjoyed by the cousins too. But even better, how about not just giving a gift for Christmas, but giving the gift of Christmas itself? After all, there is no comparison. By far our greatest treasure is Christ Jesus, the Son of God Who became our brother that we might be children of the heavenly Father. What could be better than giving Jesus to others?

Parents give Jesus to their children when they gather the family around the Word to listen to the prophecies of the One who would be born of a virgin in Bethlehem. Children give Jesus to us all when they joyfully announce on Christmas Eve, "*While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born.*" (Luke 2:6 NIV84) What gift could possibly mean more to a friend who is on edge because of all the violence and uncertainty in the world than the news of the Child Who came to win the victory over sin and death and bring peace between sinners and the holy God? Give the gift of Christmas by including a Bible passage and your own short message of Christ-centered hope in the cards you send and the notes

you post online. Invite the unchurched neighbor to join you for a midweek Advent service. While the headline news tells of disasters, suffering, and death, Christmas is all about God's love and His determination to save the lost.

When you give a gift which you already love, you can hardly wait to see the person open it. You anticipate the joy he will have in seeing the gift. You hand him the package and say, "Here, open this one first!" You share the excitement of the moment. Let's give the Christ Child to others with that same eager anticipation, for all that God gives us through Jesus is His gift for all. Knowing that we have someone to whom we can go with all our burdens is priceless. To have the Lord tell us that salvation is a free gift, not something we have to earn, is the key to de-stressing in this sinful world. Let us hold the Savior close in our hearts as Simeon held the Baby in his arms and exclaimed, "My eyes have seen your salvation!" Let us give Christmas as energetically as did the shepherds who ran and told everyone what they had seen and heard, and as exuberantly as did elderly Anna who gave thanks to God and spoke about the Child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

This year, let's not settle for just giving gifts for Christmas, but give the Christ of Christmas Himself. "*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*" (2 Cor. 9:15 NIV84)



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

Lutheran Spokesman

501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI, 54701

SEEN IN PASSING

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

Will Christians Return to Church After Pandemic?

A study published in June by Democracy Fund + UCLA Nationscape indicates that American church-goers are ambivalent about returning to in-person worship after state governments lift various restrictions on assemblies. "Fewer than half (48%) of religiously affiliated Americans who attended services before the COVID-19 outbreak say they would definitely or probably attend religious services even if public health officials deemed it safe. On this question, there are striking differences across religious traditions. More than six in ten (63 percent) white evangelical Protestants who attended services before the pandemic say they would likely return to the pews if public health officials advised lifting those restrictions. Fewer white Catholics (47 percent), white mainline Protestants (46 percent), black Protestants (46 percent), Hispanic Catholics (38 percent), and Jews (33 percent) who participated in worship services previously say they would be likely to return." Cox, Daniel and Griffin, Robert. "Religious Americans Agree on Limiting In-Person Services, Split on Returning to Worship as Usual." *Voter Study Group*. AEI.org, 22 May 2020. Web. 10 Jun. 2020.

Unexpected Explosion of Christianity in Iran.

"A new survey by a Netherlands-based research group has supported the claims of rapid church growth inside Iran in recent years. There are approximately 300,000 known Armenian and Assyrian Christians who have lived in Iran for centuries. The new survey from GAMAAN, however, found that 1.5% of all respondents identified as Christian – a number that surpasses 1 million. There is a reported 19.6% annual growth rate among evangelical churches." This is despite the fact that both proselytizing for and converting to Christianity remain crimes in Iran, punishable by fines, imprisonment, or even death. Abbot, Joel. "Third-party survey shows explosive church growth in Iran, confirming at least 1 million Christians." *Church World*. Disrn.com, 10 Sept. 2020. Web. 17 Oct. 2020.



Minnesota Pastoral Conference, held October 6-7 at Grace Lutheran Church, Sleepy Eye, Minnesota

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Call for Nominations: Pastors, professors, male teachers, and voters of congregations within the Church of the Lutheran Confession are invited to nominate individuals for the following synodical offices to be elected at the 2021 CLC Convention:

- CLC President
- CLC Vice-President
- CLC Moderator
- CLC Secretary
- Board of Trustees—Called Servant
- Board of Trustees—Lay Member
- Board of Regents—Called Servant
- Board of Regents—Lay Member
- Board of Missions—Called Servant
- Board of Missions—Lay Member
- Board of Education—Teacher Member
- Board of Education—Lay Member



Member nominations will be received January 1, 2021 through March 31, 2021. Nomination forms, lists of eligible called servants, and submission information are available on the clclutheran.org website. Those candidates nominated this past January through March will be retained on the 2021 ballot.

-- Pastor Paul D. Nolting, Moderator