

Pastors' Page

In recent years here at Faith Lutheran, we have described the time between Reformation Sunday and Epiphany as the "holy-day" season. The word holiday is a contraction of holy day and these three-plus months of the year are loaded with them. It makes this such a treasured part of each year.

Not long ago, a member of Faith's church council admitted that she was not aware how many holidays in our culture have Christian roots. For example, Halloween comes from All Halloweds' Evening, the night before All Saints' Day. Valentine's Day is actually the feast day of St. Valentine, a real person in church history. St. Patrick's Day was not originally about green beer and lucky shamrocks, but the story of Padraig who brought Christianity to Ireland.

A less direct example of that comes when we mark a new year starting on January 1. Although we think of this as a new beginning, a time to make resolutions and establish needed changes in our lives, it is actually an entirely artificial transition based on how our society has chosen to mark time. It does not even fit the solar calendar, which would suggest a new year begins with the winter solstice in December or—as it was, in fact, marked many years ago—with the start of spring in March.

Observing New Year's Day does, however, reflect a distinctly Christian point of view. Whenever we reckon time as B.C. (before Christ) or A.D. (anno Domini, in the year of our Lord), we acknowledge Jesus Christ as the linchpin of human history. Everything changed with his birth and history is now recorded as counting forward until he appears again in glory at the Last Day.

That way of reckoning time is also distinctly Christian. Pagan religions think of time as circular, an endless cycle of birth and death that has no purpose or conclusion. Christianity, however, declares that history, indeed all of reality, has an end point, a culmination, a direction that was established by God at creation, assured by Jesus' death and resurrection, and awaits its final consummation once "he has put all his enemies under his feet." (I Corinthians 15:25) To know that all of history has a direction and purpose means that our lives also have meaning and an end point with Christ as Lord. Life is not just "one thing after another," but each of our lives reflects the intent of God who created us in His image.

By the time you read this, you may already have celebrated New Year's Day for 2026. But whether you are looking back on that holiday or still looking forward to it, consider it, too, to be a "holy-day." See in the start of a new year a sign of God bringing creation ever closer to that day when sin and evil are banished forever, and "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1) will be established for all eternity.

See you in church! Pastor Scott Grorud



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Stewardship Matters



Faith's pastors and elected leaders have talked often in the last few years about trying to change our church's long-standing pattern of opening up a huge deficit during each year and relying on massive offerings in December to close the gap. One reason for that is because the church's expenses remain steady throughout the year and cannot be put off until December.

Another is that it gets tiresome to spend every Advent season emphasizing the church's financial need.

But there is another, even better reason to try to change this habit. The annual rush to meet the church's expenses focuses the whole notion of Biblical stewardship far too much on the financial needs of the church, rather than the

call to give freely and joyfully according to how God first provides for us. The heart of stewardship is gratitude to God, not meeting budgets. Our giving should be the same whether the church is broke or running a surplus, because it is based on what God first gives us. Our giving is meant to be a joyful opportunity to serve God, not merely a way to pay the church's bills.

So, we are making the appeal again this year. As a family of Faith, could we determine our giving as a proportion of our income, rather than a flat dollar amount? Could we distribute that giving more evenly throughout the year to avoid a big deficit in the General Fund? Most of all, could we look forward to an Advent season that does not require constant emphasis on huge year-end giving? It is worth a try! Thank God and thank you!





Leap of Faith Capital Campaign

The first anniversary of the Leap of Faith capital campaign is fast approaching. In many ways, it has been a marvelous year. Just over \$3 million has been pledged by the family of Faith over the three years of the campaign. About \$700,000 of that amount is already on hand. That is such a generous,

committed outpouring of support for the future of this congregation.

The only downside of the campaign is that all of those pledges and most of that giving has come from just one-third of the congregation's households. If the other two-thirds responded in a similar way, completing Phase II of the building plan would be much more of a possibility.

If you or someone you know has not yet made a commitment to the Leap of Faith campaign, please consider or encourage joining this effort to provide for the ministry needs of the congregation, now and well into the future. We believe that God can and will provide all that we need for our own needs and for this ministry that He has entrusted to us.



Online Pledge Card

Blessings and Challenges of Standing with Mission Partners

From Pastor Paul Knudson

For several years Faith Lutheran has been sending \$1,000 annually to support Brother Titus, a mission leader in Nigeria. We have done this through one of our mission partners, Dr. Christoph, whose mission organization supports many different witnesses bringing Christ to the Muslim world.

For many years now Brother Titus has faced threats to his life. I couldn't help but think of him as reports were coming out of Nigeria of mass killings of Christians by Islamic extremists. I reached out to Dr. Christoph to get his take on the situation. He did not minimize the challenges Christian face in that hostile environment. But on the other side, he did share some marvelous news. For years, facing challenges to their safety, many have been bearing witness to Christ to their Muslim neighbors. The results continue to be major growth of the Christian population to the point that Brother Titus and other Christian leaders have needed to divide up the country into what we might call districts to better serve these witnesses to Christ and those coming to faith in Him.

The story of witness in Nigeria should focus more on this news. Christians are bearing witness to Muslims through other partners in mission through the support we at Faith Lutheran and the Augustana District provide. Suffering may come to be sure, but more importantly in places like Ethiopia and India, the Good News of Jesus Christ is shared with Muslims. Many are coming to Christ. This is Good News we would do well to share with others in these often dark times.



Stump the Pastor

Q: I saw a reference to the Book of Enoch? Is that related to the Bible at all?

A: This question from a confirmation student delves deep into the background of the Bible. Many books were written by Jews and Christians in the time between the end of the Old Testament and the early Church. Most of them were judged by Jewish or Christian leaders

not to be inspired works of Scripture, but they can be interesting to read. In particular, scholars study these intertestamental works to track how theological insights developed in those years.

Two groups of those books stand out. One is called the Apocrypha, an influential collection of 15-18 books that was widely read around the time of Jesus. The name Apocrypha, however, means "things that are hidden," indicating obscure or cryptic works that are hard to understand. Later, apocryphal came to mean second-rate or untrustworthy, in part because these books were excluded from the final list of 66 books in the Bible, though some of them are included in Bibles printed for Roman Catholics. (The reason why is too long a story to tell here.)

The other main group of intertestamental works is called the Pseudepigrapha (pronounced *sood-uh-PIG-ruff-ah.*) That is a Greek term that means "false title," because these eleven books claim to be written by great figures in Israel's past, but they were obviously written much later. Crediting those ancestors as the authors was done to honor them, not to lie or commit fraud. It was something like authors today who write under a pseudonym, except that the supposed authors of these books were real people who were long-since dead. Three of these books were credited to Enoch, although I Enoch has been read the most.

The Pseudepigrapha were also influential in their day, but Jewish scholars consider them to be *even less reliable* than the Apocrypha. None of them were included in any version of the Old Testament, much less the final list of 39 books. That is important to know, because people can hear about mysterious books like Enoch and assume they are more important than they really are. There is certainly something intriguing about them and it won't hurt anyone to read them, but it is the widely-held conviction of Jewish and Christian scholars alike that they do not have the same status as the books in the Bible and are not even on the same plane as the Apocrypha.

Seniors Scene

"January and 2026 are just around the corner." I've been hearing it; have you? What seemed so far away not too long ago is now here. We've been filling up our new calendars with appointments, and church, social and family events, maybe even vacation plans. It all seems so new; and it is. It's 2026, even when I forget to leave 2025 behind on my checks and letters.



It's always nice to have a new beginning. I still recall my kindergarten teacher giving me a clean sheet of paper to start over. Are you one of those who make a New Year resolution or have you given up on that?

Here's something to consider: as followers of Jesus every day is a new day, because Jesus understands how our sin overpowers us. Each day He says, over and over, "Let's start over again. I forgive wherever you fail Me, and give you strength for a new beginning." That's what is happening when He says, "Your sins are forgiven. My cross and resurrection have not only forgiven you everything wrong in your life, but along with forgiveness I will raise you up to live in and for Me. It is how you respond to Me for loving you for all eternity." That is the very best and most fulfilling life one could ever live.

With the new year come some new Seniors' Potluck programs, beginning on <u>January 29, 2026</u>. Pastor Aaron Albrecht has been pastor for St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, Fernando Township, near Stewart for quite a few years. You have heard him preach at our round robin Lenten services, and he has been a steadfast member of New Hope Mission Society, with K.K. Alavi and son, Abdul, in India. But did you know he himself served as a missionary in Japan for 16 years? He will tell us about some interesting work he did, partly among university students.

Bibleopoly Celebration - Sunday, January 4, 2026

Bibleopoly participants of ALL AGES (and everyone else), you are invited to the Faith Center to celebrate the number of books that have been read by the Faith congregation in 2025. Come join the celebration during the Digging Deeper hour for cake, Bible trivia, and more!





Theo Thursday Book Study Returns!

Starting Thursday, January 15, at 12 noon

Join us in the office conference room as we read Face to Face, part two of Amy Mantravadi's historical novel of the clash between Martin Luther and Erasmus. We will read a section each week and then meet over the noon hour to discuss what we have read. Be sure to buy the book before the 15th! Talk to Pastor Dave for more information.

P.S. Feel free to bring your lunch along to eat while we talk if you are coming over your work lunch hour.

Faith Lutheran Church Annual Meeting - Sunday, January 28!

Please plan to attend the Faith Lutheran Church Annual meeting on Sunday, January 28, at 12 noon. Lunch will be served between the 10:10 a.m. worship services and the meeting so you don't have to run out to eat beforehand. This meeting typically lasts about an hour and is an important part of the life of the church, with election of new leadership and review



and approval of the 2026 budget, to highlight just a couple of items. It is important to have as many eligible congregational voters as possible present. All active members, including those who have been confirmed at Faith, are eligible to vote at these meetings. See you ALL there!





MEAL

Faith Lutheran Outreach Opportunities

The 2026 sign-up boards are available for sponsoring a Sunday morning radio broadcast on KDUZ (\$145/broadcast), and for providing flowers for worship in memory or honor of someone or a special event. There is a separate sign-up in Foundation for those who want to provide flowers for worship in that space. (For a flower sponsorship, contact the florist of vour choice, order the flowers, and request delivery to church on the preceding Friday.) There is also a board where you can sign-up to serve one of the Free Community Meals.

These meals are provided on the second Sunday of each month (with a couple of exceptions) from 4-5:30 p.m. There are funds available to help pay for the food, but volunteer groups are needed to plan, prepare, serve, and clean-up afterward.

Attention Snow Birds

As you prepare to head south for the winter, we would love to have your temporary address so that we can keep you in the loop of all things "Faith Lutheran" while you are gone.

are! Please call the office with your temporary address, the date you plan to leave and when you

We can't forward your giving statements, newsletters, etc. to you if we don't know where you plan to return. Help us keep you "In the Know!"



Don't forget that you can get your monthly Faith Matters and weekly news via e-mail if you are not already doing so.

Worship Snapshot: The Physical Elements of Worship

When you walk into our worship spaces at Faith, what do see? You may see candles, colored altar cloths, a baptismal font, banners, stained glass windows, a cross. These physical elements are standard for any church you enter. At the least, there will probably be a cross and a Bible. At the most, you may see human sized statues of Biblical characters and other saints, towering alters, thuribles of incense, a tree or large plants, real or fake, may even be displayed. Why do some churches seem so bare and others so elaborate?

To answer that question, we look to the leaders of the Reformation, John Calvin and Martin Luther. Both Calvin and Luther recognized the political and economic power of the Catholic church and saw how it undermined the spiritual authority that the church was meant primarily to uphold. We are familiar with how the Reformation inspired Protestant churches continue to conduct the liturgy and spiritual sanctification of her people.



Not as discussed are the ways in the which the Reformation *visually* set apart Protestant and Catholic churches. John Calvin set out directly to object to the Catholic church which traditionally incorporated intricate stone and wood carvings, statues, tapestries, and large stained-glass windows. Calvin saw these as distractions from the sole purpose of corporate worship, to hear the Word of God. Presbyterian, Reformed, Congregational, and other Reformed Baptist churches that followed in the wake of the Calvinist movement often have sanctuaries void of adornments. Many have a simple altar and Bible. On the other hand, Martin Luther did not think it necessary to strip away the elements of the Catholic church, but rather change the thinking behind them. He saw art as one of the many parts that make up the church, the body of Christ. He believed that art could serve as a tool to teach and point people to God instead of being used as objects of veneration.

Here I lay out a list of some worship elements and their roles in the Sunday morning worship drama.

The Cross reminds us that we proclaim and celebrate Christ crucified. The cross is, or should be, the central visual symbol in every Lutheran church. It is here that God meets us.

Candles burn as a visual reminder of Christ as the light of the world. The Paschal Candle symbolizes the risen Christ and burns during the Easter season and during funerals. The eternal flame burns as a reminder that Christ's light is constant in this world, and the darkness cannot extinguish it.

The Baptismal Font is prominently placed in the worship space to remind us that we are people of God by Holy Baptism, and that God comes to us and claims us as his own.

The Pulpit and Bible are the location for the main event of a worship service, the reading and proclamation of God's Word to his people.

The Altar or Communion table stands prominently in the worship room because it is here that Christ makes himself present in the meal. The altar table is traditionally free standing to remind us that we are guests gathered around Christ at his holy meal.

Other Visual Elements such as paraments, stained glass, Biblical artwork, and statues of Christ, remind us of the Biblical drama as well as visual markers for the season and time of worship. These items may also serve as educational tools in worship or visual representations that ground our faith life and bring us closer to God.

God's creation is full of beauty and he designed humans to have a sensibility of what is beautiful. However, there is an important distinction between what in the worship space is decoration and what is worship aid or element. Decorations such as flowers, wreaths, ribbons, etc. are nice, but they do not point directly to God. Each element serves as a reminder or symbol for what God has done to us and for us. God forgives us, he redeems us, he seeks us, and dwells with us. We hear the living Word. We see God in the elements. We feel God in the waters. We taste God in the meal. By consuming the elements of worship with all of our senses, our whole selves, we are incorporated again and again into Christ that we may follow the way of the cross.

If you are interested in learning more about the history of worship elements as well as other pieces of our worship service such as music, dance, and art and the purposes they serve in the life of faith, stay tuned for Digging Deeper announcements later this month!

Soli Deo Goria!

Faith Lutheran Church Support Groups



For more information or to plug into any of the following support groups please call the church office at 320-587-2093 and ask for Pastor Paulus Pilgrim, Jeff Amundson, or Marsha Schmit.



1) FACe Cancer Support Group This group is open to members and non-members of Faith alike. Those with cancer, those who are in remission, and family members who are caregivers of those with cancer are encouraged to participate in this support group. The FACe group meets the second and fourth Thursday morning of each month in the third floor conference room at 10 a.m. A Zoom option is available for those who are not able to attend due to health or distance obstacles.

2) Caregiver Support Group Meets the THIRD Thursday of each month September—May at 4 p.m.

3) Grief Support Group meets as needed throughout the year.

Ministry Teams

Faith Lutheran Church Leadership

This month's ministry team highlight is the Music and Worship Ministry Team. The work of this team can be seen in various capacities throughout the year. The most notable is the summer park worship preparations. However, this team doesn't simply act as the church's private equipment movers; they serve in other creative ways as well. The Music and Worship Ministry Team supports the worship life of the church by organizing the Maundy Thursday disciple re-enactment, providing feedback and support in seasonal programing, planning

concerts that feature in-house and guest artists, music ministry recruitment, and designing and making suggestions for worship beautification. Another important job of this team is the management and upkeep of the music facilities and equipment. You may remember the handbell refurbishing fundraiser or the donations needed to clean the choir robes. Recently, this team has been discussing and recommending actions to restore the organ and replace old audio system equipment in our worship areas. The work of the Music and Worship Ministry Team is equally active and hands-on as it is creative and problem solving.

The Music and Worship Ministry Team consists of members who attend worship from all three of our worship offerings at Faith; First Word, Sanctuary, and Foundation. This is to ensure that each worship time and style has a voice and is represented in the music and worship program and ministry offerings at Faith. Current members of this team are as follows: Dave Skaar (council chair), Derek Durst, Justin Beck, Mona Hjerpe, Emily Troska, Roxanna Boe, and Mary Parker. These members support the staff liaison Austin Willhite, Director of Music and Worship.

The current team only fills seven of the eight positions needed and a church council representative position is unfilled.

Thrivent Grants and Choice Dollars

This is a reminder to those of you who have Thrivent policies that you are eligible for two Thrivent Grants each year. Faith has a number of opportunities you can support with a Thrivent Grant. Contact the church to find out how you can support the missions and ministries of Faith Lutheran Church with one of these grants.

If you have Choice Dollars that you can designate to a non-profit of your choice, the ministries of Faith can also be supported through these gifts (that includes a one time gift to the Leap of Faith Campaign). You have until the end of March to designate your 2025 dollars, but don't wait. Designate today!





Aftershock

This ministry meets on the school early-release days from 1:15 p.m.—4:30 p.m., and is for children in kindergarten—5th grade. Children get picked up from school, have a snack, make crafts, play games, have a Bible story time and worship.

NEXT DAY: January 7.

If you are able to volunteer for Aftershock, please reach out to Laura Stowman. Thank you!

56er's

56er's is an after-school program on Wednesdays for ANYONE in 5th and 6th grade. Our time is filled with hang time, snack, lesson, and games. This group meets right after school until 5:15 p.m. Go to our church website to register your child.

NO 56ER'S ON: January 7 & March 11.

Sunday School

This month Sunday School children are learning about the many miracles Jesus has done, like protecting Jonah healing a man who could not walk, and calming a storm.

NO SUNDAY SCHOOL: January 4 & March 8.

Mark your 2026 Summer Calendars! Mystery Bus

5th—7th grade **June 9—11**



Vacation Bible School

Preschool—4th grade
June 29 –July 2

Day Camp

Kindergarten—5th grade
August 3—6

Sign-ups will be coming soon.



Faith Lutheran Youth night continues for all high school students on Wednesdays from 7:00—9:30 p.m.

HELP SERVE FREE LUNCH!

Faith serves Free Lunch on Thursday, February 12, and we need your help. Commitment is 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Contact Kristen if you have more questions!

Snow Tubing, HAY Event

Faith, along with other Hutchinson churches, takes high school and middle schoolers to Powder Ridge for a night of snow tubing.

The cost is \$20

We meet at Faith Lutheran at 5:15 p.m.

We meet at Faith Lutheran at 5:15 p.m and arrive back at 10:00 p.m. High School Night is January 28 Middle School Night is January 29



Questions? Prayer Requests? Contact us!
Laura Stowman—Director of Children and Family
Ministries—lauras@faithlc.com
Kristen Durst—Director of Youth and Family
Ministries—kristend@faithlc.com



How Can I Keep From Singing?

Back in college, Monday night was worship night. No matter how much reading, writing, or studying I had on my plate or how snowy and cold it was, I would trek across campus to the small gym to worship. A perk of attending Concordia College in Moorhead, MN, was that I was surrounded by amazing musicians and vocalists! I loved when I got to stand next to my friend Helena. She is a soprano with an angelic voice. She would harmonize with the melody and I would just get goose bumps every time! But I counted myself blessed when I stood by another friend who did not have the gift of singing, because she sang loudly, off key, but with a passion for Jesus. She didn't care what people thought of her voice. Her praises were strictly for God alone.

My friends showed me that singing is for everyone. Whether we are good at singing or not, whether we like singing or not, we still praise God. We praise God because He designed our bodies to be able to sing and He gave us the gift of music to help us remember the words we are singing. Through song we are able to express our thanks and prayers, and to share the Good News of Jesus with others.

Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Psalm 96:2

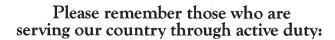
I often recall a few stories Pastor Paulus shared about visits he's had with older congregation members who have either lost the ability to read, hold their Bible, or their memory was fading. But Pastor Paulus was able to start singing a hymn and somehow the members had joined in. They were still able to hear the Good News of God as our Comforter, Savior and Lord through the gift of praise.

Singing helps us delight in and understand God more deeply. And it's going to be even better in heaven!

So I pray that you do not let the fear of judgment of others hold you back from singing, nor the lack of interest in singing. I pray that you will sing to God all the days of your life, praising Him for gift of everlasting life and hope.

Laura Stowman, Director of Children and Family Ministry

<u>Please Remember in Prayer</u>



LtCdr. Brett Stadsklev (Navy, San Diego, CAson-in-law of Judy and Tom Felber)
Spc. Jones R. Reid (Space Force, Patrick, FL - son of Melissa Straka, grandson of Sherry Schuetz

Please contact the church office to make any changes or additions to this list.



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Remember our Faith members in nursing homes and health care centers:

Buffalo Lake Nursing Home Kathy Fabel

<u>Cedar Crest - Silver Lake</u> Patricia Lambert

Cokato Nursing Home Clara Betker

Elaine Blade

GlenFields— Glencoe Barb Helland

Harmony River Shirley Holtz Wilbur Johnson

<u>Prairie Senior Cottages</u> Lorallen (Smudge) Schmeling

Prince of Peace Maynard Holtz

Oaks

Phyllis Blum
Deloris Olson
Carol Otto
DuWayne Peterson
Alice Poshek

Woodstone Cyndy Ollrich

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OUR MISSION IS:

BUILDING FAITH

"EQUIP THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY, FOR BUILDING UP THE BODY OF CHRIST" EPHESIANS 4:12



TO LIVE OUT THAT MISSION, GOD CALLS US TO:

FOLLOW JESUS

ANNOUNCE THE GOSPEL

INVITE ALL PEOPLE

TEACH CHRISTIAN TRUTH

HELP ALL WHO ARE IN NEED