



News

of the Iowa Mission District of the North American Lutheran Church

www.iowamissiondistrict.com

December 2020

A Word from the Dean

“The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 1:6–7, 9)

The writer of Ecclesiastes writes from a place somewhat like the times in which we are living right now. There is certainly a sense in which all of us feel stuck in some sort of unhappy rut with no obvious way out. When the pandemic was first pronounced and we began operating under several restrictions, there was a hope that this new way of living would be short in duration. I recall even hoping that we would be able to have some sort of normal Easter worship experience, and that was more than seven months ago. Now it seems almost certain that even Christmas celebrations will have to be altered.

Covid fatigue is the term being used more and more to describe the phenomenon that is affecting many of us. This can mean that we are growing weary of the restrictions under which we have been living for these many months so that we are increasingly irritable and despairing. Secondly, Covid fatigue can mean that we are more prone to be sloppy in our vigilance against the virus' spread and are more likely to at least be somewhat reckless in venturing out from our isolation and engaging in activities where we are more prone to exposure, even if only a little bit.

Many of us have lived most, if not all our lives, in times of relative prosperity and ease. Nearly all of us have had to endure personal crises, but these have not been the sorts of issues that extend beyond one's family. I can't help but think that we have become a bit 'soft' because we have lived during such times. And now that we are faced with something that is more prolonged and beyond our control, we are at dis-ease.

There are many alive today who recall an earlier time when all in our nation lived under difficult restrictions for an extended period. During the second World War, there were restrictions placed on everyone that rationed several material resources that we take for granted today. Notable among these were rations placed on gasoline at the rate of three gallons per week and sugar at the rate of a half-pound per week. These restrictions were in place for more than three years. On top of having to endure this rationing was the loss of life that accompanied those years, as millions of young men traveled half-way across the world, many of them never to return. And many of those who lived in those days had also lived through the terrible days of the Great Depression only a few years earlier.

What I wonder as I consider all this is how we will respond today in the face of difficult times. That we struggle with things as they are right now is easily apparent. And that many of us are getting to the end of our rope is also quite apparent. So then what? Do we just let go of the rope and give up? Do we break under the pressure and lash out at everything and everyone, even God?

In Isaiah 45:5-7 we read: *“I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things.”* In these verses God makes abundantly clear that there is nothing that happens in this world that happens apart from Him. Good times and bad come by God's hand. And maybe, just maybe, the times in which we live are meant to bring each of us to the end of our rope, to the end of our strength, to force us to face the fact that we can't do this on our own so that we will look for strength somewhere and in Someone else. Psalm 121 tells us where and Who that Someone is: *“I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”* If we can come to this truth, maybe, just maybe, we can come to some peace with how things are because we know that all things are under God's control. There is an adage that says, *“The more things change, the more they stay the same.”* And thank God for that, for God never changes. He's always there, waiting for us to realize how much we need Him, and to put all our trust in Him.

Pastor Christopher Staley, Dean, Iowa Mission District, NALC



Sola Fide—Saved by Faith

*Pr. Barbara M. Wills
Peace Lutheran Church
Northwood, Iowa*

Through the centuries theologians have studied, taught and preached about the theology of what has come to be known as the “solos”: Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, and Christ Alone. Thousands of treatises and books have been written about them. Yet this critical insight into how God saves us is probably a continuing mystery to most faithful Christians. If we only need one of the four “solos”, why do we have the others? And one of the most misunderstood of the “solos” is “faith alone”: if we are saved by faith alone, does that mean we can go our merry way, doing whatever we want, without changing our thoughts or behavior? The apostle Paul addressed this question in the first century church. His answer to the Christians in Rome who seemed to have come to this conclusion about their faith was, “*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*” (Romans 6:1-4)

One of the ways we describe salvation in light of these four “solos” is this: We are saved by grace through faith in Christ, who is revealed to us through Holy Scripture, the written word of God. Faith must always be in something or someone. The only One who could save fallen humanity was God Himself. He took on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, lived among us, took our punishment of death for us on the cross, and showed His supreme power in overcoming death in the resurrection. This was not a physical *resuscitation*, but an *eternal return to life*. Thus, our Lord Jesus bestows this gift upon those who turn to Him in faith, giving them an eternal relationship of love and life with God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, our faith is in Christ Jesus as the One who came to save us from eternal death and bring us into this loving relationship.

How can this be? As we talk about the things of God, it’s easy to become confused. God is the ultimate mystery, beyond our understanding. However, we humans want to understand, and we try to solve every mystery. The problem is that faith is based on trust, not on proof. If we have proof, we don’t have faith. The writer of the book of Hebrews explains faith this way: *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* (Hebrews 11:1)

One of my favorite examples for how we hold faith together with grace, Scripture and the Lord Jesus, is the account of the Pharisee, Nicodemus’, visit to Jesus, recorded in the Gospel of Saint John. Nicodemus was a scholar and teacher—a leader in the Jewish religious

establishment. He had spent his whole life learning God’s laws and studying the writings of the prophets. He was apparently fascinated by Jesus’ teachings and wanted to understand—to *figure it out*. He came to visit Jesus by night—perhaps because he didn’t want his colleagues to know he was interested in what Jesus had to teach. As the narrative unfolds, we also see that Nicodemus was literally “in the dark”, apparently unable to understand the things Jesus told him about what it means to be “born anew” of water and the Spirit. While we know “the rest of the story”, since Jesus’ death and resurrection, if we had listened in on this conversation at the time, we would probably have been as mystified as Nicodemus was. But what Jesus finally told him is this: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* (John 3:16)

John 3:16 may be the most popular, and most often quoted, of all Scripture verses. It is sometimes called the “Gospel in miniature”. And it explains the four “solos” and their relationship to each other. “God so **loved** the world” is pure grace—grace is God’s undeserved love for us. “He gave **His only Son**”, Christ Jesus, the One who saves. So that “whoever believes in him should not perish”—this is the kind of belief that embodies trust in the person and the message the person brings. And this is all revealed to us through the ancient Scriptures that Nicodemus knew so well—the writings of God’s people and prophets through the ages that foretold a Savior. In Genesis 3:15 God Himself promised that one of Eve’s offspring would destroy the power of Satan, and throughout the Old Testament Scriptures this promise was renewed. And when the time was right, God sent Jesus—Jesus alone—to save us. This is what it means that we can be saved *only* by grace, through faith in Christ, Who is revealed to us through Holy Scripture. There is nothing whatever that we can do to save ourselves. If we could have done that through obedience to the Laws of God, Jesus would not have had to be sacrificed for us.

But that still leaves us with the question addressed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 6. If it is only God’s grace and faith in Christ that saves us, why does it matter how we live? The answer rests in the nature of “salvation”. God is not in the business of selling “fire insurance”. What He wants is this holy, loving relationship with us. Salvation involves “cleaning us up” in the waters of Holy Baptism, and then adopting us into the family of God. If we have really *received* the forgiveness our Lord pours out upon *us*, then our desire will be to share this love and compassion with *others*. As we put our trust in Christ, we become conduits through which His grace flows out to others.

This and That From Around the Iowa Mission District

Since COVID has restricted so many of our gatherings this year and the opportunity to see one another in person, it has seemed good to the Mission District Council, and to me, to introduce some pastors and churches in our Mission District. Thank you to our Dean, Pastor Christopher Staley, for contributing these pictures from his visits. Hopefully, in the months ahead there will be more to share.

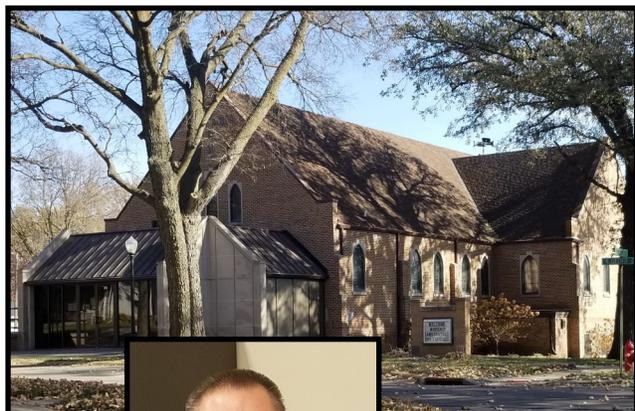
Right: *Lay Minister Tracy Nerem serves First Lutheran in Gilmore City, Iowa.*

Below: *Pastor David Klappenbach and Bethany Lutheran in Laurens where he serves.*



Below left: *Pastor Eric Meissner who serves Trinity Lutheran in Avoca, IA.*

Below: *St. Paul Lutheran, Irwin, IA, and Bethlehem Lutheran, rural Harlan, IA, both of which are served by Pastor Ron Rasmussen.*



This & That, continued



Care Basket Delivery: *In Feb. St. John's-Vilmar Little Lutherans and Confirmation students made 10 tie blankets and put together care baskets to be given to children who end up at the emergency department of the Waverly Health Center. Due to COVID-19, delivery of the baskets was delayed until Nov. 1. Each of the baskets delivered by the Luther Leaguers contained a blanket, stuffed animal, religious coloring book, crayons, a Bible storybook, and a get well card signed by the kids.*

St. John's Lutheran Church—Vilmar



Operation Christmas Child: *On Wednesday, Oct. 28, the Little Lutherans at St. John's-Vilmar had a lesson in showing love to one another, just as Jesus showed his love for us by dying on the cross to save us from our sins. To demonstrate the lesson, the kids helped pack shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child. When they were finished, a prayer of blessing and thanksgiving was said for the boxes and the children who will receive them. St. John's-Vilmar filled 70 boxes this year.*



Christmas Tree: *St. John's-Vilmar Luther League participated in "Wilder Christmas," event at Wilder Park in Allison. The girls decorated a tree for the event at the park. Their devotion was about keeping Christmas not only at the center of their Christmas holiday, but also at the center of their lives. With that in mind, they put a nativity in the center of our tree, and got creative with ribbons, bows, lights, and tinsel.*

Pictures from the Past



Pastors Solveig Zamzow, Ken Kimball and Marshall Hahn prepare breakfast at the April 2013 pastors' retreat.



Pastors Ken Kimball, Solveig Zamzow and Christopher Martin share a light-hearted moment with Bishop John Bradosky during his visit to our Mission District in July 2013.

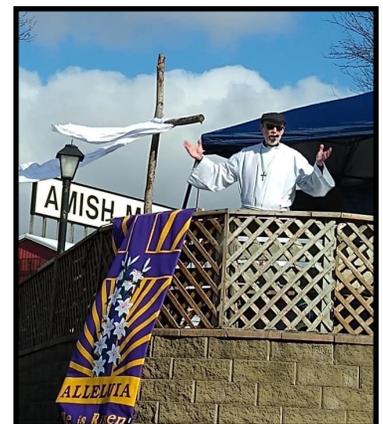


Pastor Barbara Wills with Peace Lutheran members, David Peterson and Craig Lease at the 2015 Iowa Mission District convocation.



Left: Pastors Christopher Staley and Mark Lund take a break between sessions at the 2019 NALC Convocation.

Right: Pastor David Steffenson preaches at an outdoor worship service for Easter 2020.



Announcements

Upcoming Events

April 24, 2021—9:00 a.m.—Mission District Council meeting

September 11, 2021—Iowa Mission District Convocation—Emmons Lutheran Church, Emmons, MN.

August 2-6, 2021—NALC Luther Week, Corpus Christi, TX

Please Pray for:

Lay Minister Dan Buhs who is ill with COVID.

Pastor David Schaefer who is undergoing some tests for his back.

Pastor Mel Harris who is undergoing cancer treatments and recovering from a recent surgery.

Amy Cooper (wife of Pastor Jason Cooper) who is facing more tests for her cancer.

Pastor David Steffenson who is undergoing treatments for pancreatic cancer.

All who have suffered from natural disasters, fires and other hardships.

All who are at risk for getting COVID-19, those who suffer from it, all who are caring for the sick, researching treatments and preventive measures and trying to make wise decisions for the public good.

Our Votes Count

Although you may want to hear nothing more about voting, there is an important vote that each of our congregations must consider in the coming weeks.

The NALC has as one of its four values that we are “Congregationally Focused”. One of the most important ways this is manifested is that each congregation is given the chance to consider all constitutional changes that are approved at the national convocation. These changes cannot go into effect unless two-thirds of the congregations give our assent. In other church bodies, what happens at the national conventions are handed down to congregations with no opportunity to have a say in the matter.

At the most recent NALC Convocation, two amendments were passed. It is these amendments that must be considered by each congregation, brought to a vote, and then the report of the vote must be sent to the NALC. Instruction for all this can be found at: <https://thenalc.org/projects/ratification-process-materials/>

The deadline for congregations to submit their action on these amendments is Monday, February 8th. If two-thirds or more of the congregations who submit votes by that date vote in favor of the amendments, they will be ratified. If fewer than two-thirds of the congregations who submit votes by that date vote in favor of the amendments, they will be defeated.

Most congregations have their annual meeting in January. It is during these meetings that these amendments can be considered and a vote taken. Each congregation needs to follow its own constitution to ensure that its members are aware of the amendments in plenty of time, and that the votes pass by the margin indicated in its own constitution.

Pastor Christopher Staley, Dean IMD

Donations and Correspondence

Checks sent to the Mission District for support should be made out to the *Iowa Mission District, NALC*, and mailed to Pastor Gary Burkhalter at **312 E Mission St, Strawberry Point, IA 52076**.

Correspondence for Mr. Craig Lease, Mission District Secretary, should be sent to **405 7th St. N., Northwood, IA 50459**

Items for the Mission District newsletter (pictures, news, etc.) are best sent via e-mail to Pastor Barbara Wills at barbaramwills@gmail.com.



Sharing the Faith Grace-fully

Love Letters for Christ

Letter writing seems to be a lost art—or at least is becoming so. The irony is that in an era of mass communication, and with so many possible means of messaging, texting, emailing, and writing, people seem to have poorer and poorer communication skills. There are the acronyms that require the receiver to decipher what seems often to be gibberish—LOL? The first time I encountered this acronym I thought it meant “lots of love” or “lots of luck”. It was years later that I found out it meant “laughing out loud”. Were the people sending me the message laughing at me or with me? Were they laughing humorously or sarcastically? There were no complete sentences or explanations to help. Then there is what I term the “cyber black hole”: Ignored text and email notes, unreturned voicemail messages, and those communications that are misdirected to spam folders. Fewer and fewer people write anything—either typed or hand written—that goes though the Post Office so their friends and loved ones can find something in their mailboxes besides bills and advertisements. When historians look back on our period of time, I shudder to think what their impression will be. Historically, some of the most interesting and revealing writings have been found in personal letters and journals. Much of our faith in Christ was originally communicated through hand written letters. The New Testament itself is mostly a collection of missives written by Paul and the other Apostles to various church groups scattered around the Mediterranean Sea. There’s nothing quite as interesting or magnetic as “overhearing” the messages written by one person to another. It’s a bit like eavesdropping. And one can learn a lot from such communications.

We have been given the charge from our Lord to make disciples. Such a task requires a commitment to building relationships. I believe we are neglecting an important “tool” in communicating our faith when we fail to write personal notes and letters to others. Pamphlets are written, but they are written “in general” but not “in particular”. As I read Paul’s letters to various churches, he addresses the particular needs and situations those congregations are facing, whether it’s persecution from outside or division within. He mentions people by name. He offers blessings, advice, reprimands, and prayers. The letters were read privately and in public worship. They were most likely read repeatedly. And they were copied

and shared with others—then passed down through the generations to us.

Another advantage to sharing our faith in letters is that it gives the other person a context for our beliefs and an explanation for why we’re sharing them. It also gives the person an opportunity to absorb the full message. Personal conversation is certainly important, but that’s also becoming a lost art, and more people than not catch only part of what is being said and either space out the rest of it or start formulating their own response before hearing the full message. With a written letter one must read the whole message—and has the opportunity of doing so several times—before they can offer a response. And they can’t immediately hit the “reply” button and start typing before they have at least a few minutes to absorb some of what they’ve read.

Perhaps the most compelling reason to write personal letters to others, however, is to share the love of Christ. I would not recommend writing a “cold” letter about our faith to someone we haven’t developed some rapport with first. Who is this other person? What does he or she already know about Jesus? Is this a person who is overly sensitive and needs a gentle approach or someone who thrives on confrontation? What are their other interests, occupation and hobbies? And what kind of health issues, anxieties and griefs are they facing? With some knowledge of the person in mind, we begin by praying for them and asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we begin to write. It may be important to exchange a few more general letters before being more specific about our faith—otherwise the person might begin to feel like your latest “evangelism project” or a victim of your (perceived) “good works”. Paul sets a good example. He already has a relationship with most of those to whom he’s writing, and to the others he eases into his reason for writing, knowing they already know something about him if they haven’t yet met him. He often begins his letters by expressing thankfulness or concern for his readers. Then he moves into the purpose of his letter before ending with greetings and blessings. Use a gentle touch, and be respectful of the other person’s right to be the person God created them to be. The letter isn’t meant to impose our views but to invite the person to meet the One who is most precious to us, our Lord Jesus.

Letters won’t be the best way to share faith with everyone, but they have a long and valuable history in the Church, and have been the means for bringing many people to faith—or building up their faith—through the centuries.

Pastor Barbara M. Wills

Congregations of the Iowa Mission District

Ackley: **Our Saviour's**, Call Process
Avoca: **Trinity**, Pr. Eric Meissner
Badger: **Badger Lutheran**, Pr. Scott Meier
Boyden: **St. John**, Pr. Mark Jamison
Des Moines: **Unity Evangelical Lutheran**,
Pr. Donna Joseph; Pr. Diane Joseph
Dorchester: **Waterloo Ridge**,
Prs. Bill and Diane Odermann
Eagle Grove: **Evangelical Lutheran**, Pr. Jason Cooper
Eagle Grove: **Samuel Lutheran**, Call Process
Ellsworth: **Trinity**, Pastor Jon Rollefson
Emmons, MN: **Emmons**, Pastor Ryan Henkel
Gilmore City: **First**, Tracy Nerem, Lay Minister
Grafton: **Emmanuel**, Pr. Solveig Zamzow
Greene: **St. John (Vilmar)**, Call Process
Gunder: **Marion**, Pr. Marshall Hahn
Harlan: **Bethlehem**, Pr. Ronald Rasmussen
+Huxley: **Shepherd of the Prairie**,
Scott Licht, Lay Minister
Irwin: **St. Paul**, Pr. Ronald Rasmussen
Laurens: **Bethany**, Pr. David Klappenbach
Manchester: **First**, Pr. Tony D. Ede
+Monona, **Faith**: Pr. Mel Harris
Northwood: **Peace**, Pr. Barbara Wills
Palmer: **St. John's**
Plainfield: **St. John**, Pr. Kim Thacker
Readlyn: **St. Matthew**, Pr. Jean Rabary
Readlyn: **Zion**, Pr. Jean Rabary
Robins: **Servants of Christ**, Pr. Ron Voss
+Rochester, MN: **Emmanuel**, Pr. David Steffenson
Ruthven: **Zion**, Pr. Thomas Summerfield
St. Ansgar: **First**, Pr. Christopher Staley
+St. Charles, MN—**Trinity**, Pr. David Schafer
St. Olaf: **Norway**, Pr. Marshall Hahn
Sheldon: **St. Paul**, Pr. Dan Baker
+Sibley: **Faith**, Pr. Tim Nappe
Spencer: **Trinity**, Call Process
Strawberry Pt.: **Mission in Christ**, Pr. Gary Burkhalter
Thor: **Ullensvang**, Pr. Darryl Landsverk
Waterville. **Old East Paint Creek**, Pr. Ken Kimball
Waukon: **Old West Paint Creek**, Pr. Ken Kimball

+ indicates mission congregation

The Iowa Mission District website may be found at: www.iowamissiondistrict.com. If your congregation has a web site, and you would like to have the web address linked to your church name on the Mission District web site, please send the web address to me, Pastor Barbara Wills, at barbaramwills@gmail.com.

Iowa Mission District Leadership

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Craig Lease, Secretary—
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(newsletter editor/web master):

Pastor Barbara Wills—
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*The Iowa Mission District
has 38 congregations.*



Pastors available for pulpit supply:

Pastor Paul Breddin—515--528-2284
Pastor James Glesne—563-380-8110
Pastor Jack Miller—(507) 798-2408
Pastor Paul Weeg- -641-381-0675



Pastor Tim Nappe is also available for pulpit supply. His primary focus is his ministry with "Reaching the Unreached", and he will share information about this mission work whenever he does pulpit supply for a congregation. Contact information: 712-331-4245. Or email at pastortim.milford@gmail.com