



News

of the Iowa Mission District of the North American Lutheran Church

www.iowamissiondistrict.com

February 2021

A Word from the Dean

*"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit,
but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.
Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."
(Philippians 2:3–4)*

I have a question for each of you. Is it safe to come out now? This is the sort of question you might expect from someone who has sought shelter during a tornado or derecho. It's also the sort of question that someone might be expected to ask during wartime. Or it might be the sort of question asked by a child who has locked herself in her room while her parents have spent the past several minutes or days screaming at each other for reasons the child cannot quite understand.

But, as we have all emerged from the year that will live on in memory for all of us, we might wonder the same thing as the people in these scenarios: Is it safe to come out now?

And I'm not speaking here about the pernicious virus that has had us in its grips for going on a year now. Nor am I speaking about the violence that overtook parts our country in recent months, even to the point of our nation's capital serving as battleground. What I am speaking about is how many of our communities and, more specifically, our church communities have themselves become battlegrounds.

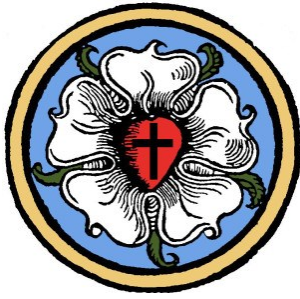
I am not interested in telling you my opinion about any of the things over which we disagreed these past few months. And I'm guessing that you're not all that interested in hearing what I might have to say as I am by no means an expert in public health or virology or any number of things.

Instead, I am concerned with the ways in which such conversations happened, or didn't happen throughout congregations in our mission district.

As citizens of this nation, we hold dear to the rights enumerated in our founding documents, the Declaration of Independence and our Constitution.

But as children of God, we have a higher calling and a citizenship that stakes claims on each of us. Jesus said it this way to His disciples: *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:34–35). St. Paul expresses a similar admonishment in the verses at the top of this page. The object, you see, is not to be right or to lay claim to one's rights, but to do for the other from humility and a true love for one another with the love we first received from Christ. Living with and for one another in this way will be a tremendous witness, or light, to the world.

Pastor Christopher Staley, Dean, Iowa Mission District, NALC



Solus Christus—Christ Alone

Pr. Marshall Hahn

Norway Lutheran Church, St. Olaf, Iowa

Marion Lutheran Church, Guner, Iowa

“Sir, we would see Jesus.” – John 12:21

When Jesus entered Jerusalem on the Sunday before His crucifixion, He was greeted by crowds from all over who had come to celebrate the Passover. Among those crowds were also “some Greeks” as John tells us – Gentiles who were also there to worship the God of Abraham. These were the ones who made the request cited above “*to see Jesus.*” Upon hearing this request, Jesus proclaims, “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*”

What is it that triggered this response from Jesus? Why would such a simple request call for such a bold proclamation. Well, first of all, there are few things that are simple in John’s Gospel. Each verse is filled with meaning. Up to this point in John’s Gospel Jesus has been saying that “*my hour has not yet come*” – but now, here it is! Why now? The key is given a few verses later when Jesus says, “*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.*” The hour Jesus refers to is the time of His suffering, death, and resurrection. It is this which will draw all nations and peoples to Him. So the appearance of these Gentiles asking for Jesus is a sign that that time is at hand.

Jesus has come to draw all people to Himself – not to a cause – or a program – or a philosophy – or even a way of life – but to Him, Jesus, Himself. Following Jesus may lead you to take up certain causes, engage in

particular activities, gain a wealth of understanding about yourself and the world, or result in all kinds of changes in your behavior, but these things are not the goal and purpose of our faith. It is Jesus Himself we are to follow. Faith in Jesus is not a means to an end, but it is the end itself – He is the Alpha and the Omega, the source and goal.

The temptation is to make these secondary things the main thing. This is a particular temptation for preachers. There is always the temptation to be relevant – as if there is anything more relevant to our faith and life than hearing the Word and following Jesus! But there is the temptation to replace the proclamation of Jesus with all sorts of other things – social justice – personal piety – success in life – wealth, health, and happiness - or whatever the latest preaching fad may be. Preachers would be well to remember Paul’s words to the people at Corinth: “*For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*” (I Corinthians 2:2)

Once, when I was a guest pastor at one of our Iowa Mission District congregations I noticed a small plaque in the sacristy. It was positioned so that the preacher would see it just before entering the pulpit. It was a reminder of the preacher’s calling. It was a reminder of why the people were there. It read:

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

This and That From Around the Iowa Mission District



Because of the COVID pandemic and having a high percentage of high-risk members, Peace Lutheran Church in Northwood has been refraining from in-person worship for the past ten months. During that time, however, various members of the congregation have put in many hours of hard work within the building. Several years ago the Baptist congregation that owned the building hospitably opened their doors to us, and we were grateful to be able to share their worship space. Two years ago they offered to sell the building to us at a price we couldn't afford not to accept. Early in 2020 the Baptist congregation disbanded, and we began the work of removing the large baptistry (with a window to the pool in the chancel wall). The area behind the chancel area has been turned into a double room for our sacristy/vestry, and the chancel wall has been faced with car-siding panels to form a beautiful backdrop for the cross. A "new-to-us" altar was recently purchased to replace the smaller table we had been using as an altar for the past few years. So many people in our congregation participated in large and small ways that it would be impossible to do them justice by trying name everyone. But their generosity of time, energy, and creativity reflects their love of the Lord Jesus and will be appreciated by members of the Body of Christ in this place for years to come. We pray it will not be long before we can gather in this beautiful space once again to hear the Word of the Lord preached and to share the Sacrament of the Altar together.

Pastor Barbara Wills

Luther's Seal

Most Lutherans are familiar with "Luther's Rose" or seal. It's part of the logo of the North American Lutheran Church, and various artistic versions of the seal can be found in church buildings, on church signs, and in assorted printed materials of Lutheran origin. Luther designed this seal to describe his theology. In a letter to Lazarus Spengler, written on July 8, 1530, he explained the meaning of his seal: *"First, there is a cross, black on a heart in red, as its natural color. This is to remind me that faith in the Crucified saves us; for if one believes with the heart, one is justified. Now although it is a black cross, although it mortifies and is designed to inflict pain, it nonetheless allows the heart to keep its color, it does not destroy its nature, that is, it does not kill but keeps alive.... (For the just lives by faith, but faith in the Crucified.) Such a heart is to be centered on a white rose in order to indicate that faith yields joy, comfort, and peace and straightway beds one on a white, pleasing rose. Nor does faith yield the peace and joy of the world. Therefore the rose would be white and not red, because white is the color of the spirits and of all the angels. This rose is on a field tinted with the hues of heaven to indicate that this joy in the spirit and faith is a beginning of the future heavenly joy, a joy which, to be sure, is even now present in faith and embraced by hope but is not yet revealed. And around this field runs a ring of gold to show that the blessedness of heaven endures forever and ever and is more precious than all pleasures and possessions of earth, as gold is the most precious and the noblest metal."*



Announcements

Upcoming Events

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

June 7-8, 2021—Iowa Mission District Pastors' Retreat—Best Western Holiday Lodge, Clear Lake, Iowa. Cost is covered by the mission district, but those wanting a private room will be asked for a \$60 donation to offset the added expense.

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

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

Please Pray for:

Pastor Mel Harris who is undergoing cancer treatments

Amy Cooper (wife of Pastor Jason Cooper)

Pastor David Steffenson who is undergoing chemo 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.

New Addresses for the NALC

When sending **correspondence** to the NALC please use the following address:

NALC Office
2655 Innsbruck Drive, Suite A
New Brighton, MN 55112-9304

Please send **donations** to this address:

North American Lutheran Church
PO Box 860565
Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565

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.

A Few of My Favorite Psalms

Psalm 23

The Shepherd's Psalm—Psalm 23—may be the most popular of all the Psalms. It's one most people want read at the funeral of a loved one (often in the King James version). It may be the only one many people know by heart. While its familiarity and the images of shepherd, sheep, green pastures and still waters may be soothing, these same images may lull us to "sleep"—and even become barriers to pondering some of the deeper messages or prayer opportunities held within these beautiful phrases. Over the years I've noticed some parallels between the 23rd Psalm and the Lord's Prayer. I have no idea if our Lord Jesus intended such a connection or if there is just a natural progression of thought, but I find the connections fascinating and helpful in keeping me "awake" to the prayerful possibilities of this Psalm.

"The Lord is my Shepherd." When I stop to ponder this entrance into the Psalm many other Scripture texts come to mind. In Ezekiel 34 the Lord pronounces judgement on the false shepherds in Israel—the kings and other leaders—who have oppressed the people and led them away from the Lord, into the worship of pagan deities. In that judgment is the promise that the Lord Himself will come and shepherd His people. He will be their true Shepherd. This promise is fulfilled in Christ. In John 10, our Lord Jesus calls the "shepherds" of His day "robbers and thieves" who prey upon the "sheep", and declares that He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. As I consider the implications of the statement that "the Lord is my Shepherd", and the ways in which shepherds love, protect and care for their sheep, it isn't hard to think of them in a parental role: *"Our Father."* The Lord who promised to come and shepherd His sheep is our heavenly Father. And as the sheep depend on their shepherd, the "faithful sheep" look to this person who cares for them in a special way—using the metaphor we can bless the name of our heavenly Father, pray for His rule—His will—which is to bring us the fullness of life and protect us from all evil. Having prayed the first line of this Psalm we already anticipate the embodiment of the whole Psalm and the whole Lord's prayer.

"I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, ... leads me beside still waters." Images of Jesus feeding the five thousand and the four thousand in the wilderness, reminding His disciples that our Father in heaven knows all our needs and will provide for us as He does for the sparrows—and even the lilies of the field—and touching those who came to Him with healing for their bodies and minds come flooding in and expand the next phrase of the Lord's Prayer: *"Give us this day our daily bread."* In the Small Catechism Luther gives a wonderful explanation of all the parts of our lives that are covered in this

petition—all that we need for daily life.

"He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake." In the Lord's prayer we pray that our sins might be forgiven even as we forgive others. This is only possible through the gift of God's grace in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. He not only leads us, as He did His disciples—teaching us God's ways through Holy Scripture and sending the Holy Spirit to open those Scriptures to us—but by taking our sins upon Himself and clothing us in His righteousness. This gift of forgiveness that comes through Holy Baptism and is renewed in the repentance and forgiveness implicit in this petition of the Lord's Prayer, restores our souls and opens us to the guidance of the Holy Spirit Who sanctifies us and helps us follow our Shepherd more closely and lovingly.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." As we pray to be led away from temptations and delivered from evil, the words of the Psalm give us a visual of what that looks like. We have all been in dark places of the soul, struggled to feel safe from evil influences, and felt vulnerable in times of physical and spiritual danger. The rod with which the shepherd fought off the enemies of the sheep, and the staff with which he rescued them from dangerous places brings to mind the cross of Christ—His dark valley of death for our sins, His rescue via the cross and resurrection that brings us forgiveness and the comfort of His promise to be with us always and to take us to be with Himself in heaven. All these assurances are embodied in the dark valley of the Psalm and the presence of the shepherd.

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies. My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." In John 14 Jesus promises the disciples that He is going to prepare a place for His faithful ones and will come and take us to Himself. The doxology to the Lord's Prayer affirms our faith in God's eternal rule, power and glory—and our trust in His promise to bring us into His eternal Kingdom. Following His resurrection our Lord offered the disciples His peace (John 20) and before His ascension He promised to be with us always (Matthew 28). Surely, indeed, His goodness and mercy follows us, and we will find rest and peace with our Good Shepherd forever.

Pastor Barbara M. Wills

Congregations of the Iowa Mission District

Ackley: **Our Saviour's**, Dan Buhs, Lay Minister
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 Lizard Township**,
Marlene Nimke, Lay Minister
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**
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

Iowa Mission District Leadership

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Pastor Burkhalter, Treasurer—
pgburkhalter52@hotmail.com

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Disaster Response Coordinator: Betty
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Mission District Communicator
(newsletter editor/web master):

Pastor Barbara Wills—
barbaramwills@gmail.com

*The Iowa Mission District
has 38 congregations.*



Pastors available for pulpit supply:

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

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.