



**News
of the Iowa Mission District
of the North American Lutheran Church**

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A Word from the Dean

RACHEL WEEPS

*A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more.” -- Matthew 2:18*

In 1974 The American Lutheran Church considered the church’s response to the issue of abortion, following the 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision by the United States Supreme Court. In preparation for that discussion, Prof. James Burtness from Luther Theological Seminary wrote A Statement on Abortion which was received as information at the Eighth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church. Commenting on the history of the practice of abortion in the Roman Empire, in which it was entirely legal for the father to dispose of his offspring either by abortion or by the practice of “exposure”, placing a newborn child on the hillside for the wild animals to devour, Burtness wrote:

“... the world into which Christianity came was a world in which abortion was widely practiced. The right of the father to dispose of his offspring, either before or after birth, was taken for granted.”

After examining the history of the church’s teaching which universally condemned the practice of abortion until very recently, he then took a look at the 1973 Supreme Court ruling. Commenting on the implications of this ruling, he stated:

“The focus has been changed from that of the father to that of the mother. But other than that, are we so far now from the days of the Roman Empire, when the father had absolute rights over the life of his prenatal or postnatal offspring?”

Considering the laws recently enacted in New York State, and those proposed in Virginia and Vermont, his comments seem particularly prescient. These laws would allow for abortion up to and beyond the moment of birth itself. If a child were to survive an attempted abortion, each of these laws would allow for foregoing any attempt to care for a child in such circumstances. Instead, such a child could be allowed to die through neglect, or simply be killed outright. This week, an attempt in the US Senate to criminalize such a practice also failed, garnering only 53 votes to protect the life of a living, breathing child that survives a late-term abortion. This is nothing short of infanticide, and is not materially different from the practice of “exposure” commonly practiced in the ancient Roman Empire.

The NALC is committed to upholding the sanctity of human life from the womb to natural death. In 2012 the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine published the document “The Lord Is With You: The Sanctity of Nascent Life” as “A Word of Counsel to the Church.” This document provides a careful and care-filled examination of the issue of abortion in our day. Our proclamation is an uncompromised word of assurance that “The Lord is with you.” He is with the child in utero. He is with the mother struggling with confusion over the news of an unintended pregnancy. He is with the couple unable to bear children of their own. Each person stands within the promise of God’s love and mercy. As the document states:

“The witness of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church is clear: There is no life that is beyond God’s care, beginning at the moment of conception. The child in utero is not simply the possession of the father or the mother, for each nascent life is the handiwork of God. “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.” (Ps 139:15).”

The Lord has created the womb as a place for protection, nourishment, and care for a life newly conceived. It is the supreme tragedy of our day that, in our nation, the womb has become the most dangerous place of all.

This Lenten season may we weep and pray and repent that this tragedy may soon end.

Pastor Marshall Hahn, Dean, Iowa Mission District, NALC



Sola Gratia: Jesus Did It All

Pastor Christopher Staley
First Lutheran Church
St. Ansgar, Iowa

He was a pillar of the congregation and the community. He was a humble and generous spirit. He was a font of history and a model in service. Even into his 90's he jogged, yes jogged, two miles a day. He had played the organ at his church for more than 60 years, had directed numerous choirs, and was a true friend to all. He was active in the church's brotherhood, a tireless 4-H leader, and was full of wisdom. And for me, as a much younger pastor, he was a fount of encouragement and a model in his reverence of the holy mysteries.

Imagine my shock when, upon visiting him in the local nursing home when his health had begun quickly to fail, he said to me with obvious agitation and anguish in his voice, "Pastor, I don't know if I've done enough good to go to heaven." I was brought nearly to tears by his raw emotion, but even more by the sheer magnitude of the disparity between the man that all of us knew and all of us loved, and this panicked and tormented soul. I am absolutely certain that if there had been any sort of "Mount Rushmore" of decency and goodness in our small town, he would have been at or near the top of everyone's list. And yet, here he was terrified that he would not be received into eternal paradise.

Clearly, he was feeling the weight of his sin. I know enough about the human condition to know that though this man was a paragon of virtue in our community, he was just as much a sinner as any of the rest of us. And it was this truth that was hammering on him. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). His earthly life was near an end and he knew it. And he also knew that he had run out of time to do much to improve his eternal balance sheet. I could have begun to list off all the good that he had done in his life in an attempt to drown out the condemnation he felt. But even if I could have done so for the moment, the torment would begin again as soon as I would take my leave. Such is the work of the tireless enemy. Like the ravaging lion that lies in wait to strike the

weak, the tired, the lonely, the sick, the Tormentor would go in for the kill. "The wages of sin is death."

There was an occasion when the disciples were confronted with a similarly confounding situation. A young man had come to Jesus, asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. In the end, Jesus offered this prescription, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21). Unfortunately, this was something the young man could not do, because he had great possessions. He walked sorrowfully away. Jesus said at his leaving, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:23–24). The way everyone regarded the dying man I described from my ministry, the disciples regarded this rich young man. Surely his riches were a sign of God's good pleasure with this young man, and just as assuredly God would be pleased with the life of service of this faithful servant.

The disciples cried out, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus' reply was blunt and shocking: "With man this is impossible" (Matthew 19:26a). We all know it's true. "The wages of sin is death." And so, it would be for all of us, but for one thing. I'm hoping you noticed that I've only quoted the beginning part of the verse from Romans. The whole verse is needed: "For the wages of sin is death, *but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" In like manner I gave you only the first part of Jesus' words in verse 26. The whole verse is needed: "With man this is impossible, *but with God all things are possible.*" This is *GRACE*: the free gift of God.

And so, to our dying friend who fears he didn't do enough, we can say with truth, "None of us can do enough, *but Jesus did it all, for you.*"

This and That from Around the Iowa Mission District

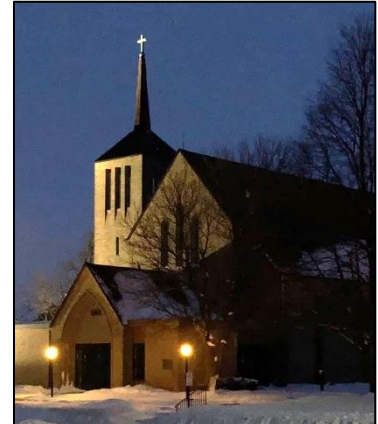
With the winter storms in February, many congregations have had to cancel or postpone worship services and events. Here are a few of our Iowa Mission District church buildings and scenic views in their winter attire.



Peace Lutheran Church, Northwood.



Eagle Grove Evangelical Lutheran Church.



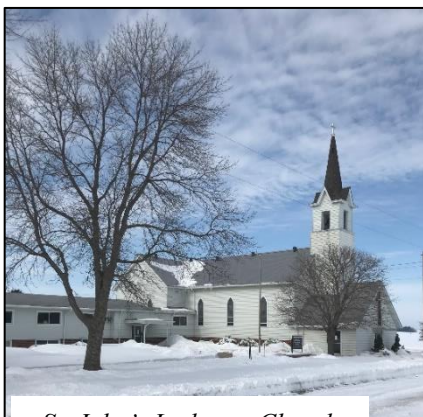
Ullensvang Lutheran Church, Thor.



Norway Lutheran Church, St. Olaf



*Emmons Lutheran Church
Emmons, MN*



*St. John's Lutheran Church
(Vilmar)*



*St. John, Western
Douglas cemetery*



Above right: The Valentine Sweetheart's Dinner that the St. Olaf Parish Luther Leaguers put on at Norway Lutheran had 18 couples who attended. The Luther Leaguers were the waitresses and waiters who served hors d'oeuvres, Lasagna, salad, dessert, and sparkling grape juice. Pianist, Maria Wettleson, Luther League president, entertained guests. The event was a fund-raiser to help pay for the Iowa Mission District Youth Mission Trip this summer.

Steadfast In God's Word

Return to the Lord Your God

The verse we sing following the second lesson during the season of Lent is a call to repentance from Joel 2:13: *“Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful; slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”*

The Scriptures are filled with admonitions to repent, and with the prayers of the repentant. One of the longest, and possibly most familiar, prayers of repentance is Psalm 51, King David's plea for forgiveness following his adultery with Bathsheba, and his subsequent murder of her husband, Uriah.

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love;

according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

² *Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!*

³ *For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.”* (verses 1-3)

Although David's sins in this sorry episode are stark and ugly, his prayer is appropriate for all sins and sinners. Our Lord Jesus taught that sin comes from our hearts, and that even lustful thoughts and anger are as wrong in God's eyes as the physical acts of adultery and murder. (Matthew 5:27; Matthew 5:21-22) Often, when we pray for forgiveness, we may sound like a broken record, and no matter how many times we repeat our pleas for forgiveness, we may feel alone and unworthy. At such times, it is helpful to turn to Scripture. Praying the prayers of God's people, as they have been offered to the Lord through the ages, reminds us of God's great mercy in forgiving those who came before us, and gives us a sense of that great cloud of sinners/saints with whom we stand before the throne of our heavenly Father. God's steadfast love and grace is poured out for us, as it was for them. We are not alone in our sorrow for sin, nor in being recipients of God's abundant mercy.

At other times, even as we hear the call to repentance, we may not be able to think of any particular sins to confess before the Lord. We may feel that we're "in control", or that we've been better than "alright" in our relationships with God and others. This was the case for the long-suffering Job, whom

God allowed to be tested by Satan. According to the ancient covenant Law, Job was indeed a righteous man with no "black marks" against him. But after a long time of testing, even he came to the point of questioning the Lord and laying out before God all his good and faithful deeds. The Lord allows Job to go on with his complaints and justifications for a while, and then answers him: *“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge. Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know!”* (Job 38:2-5a)

It doesn't take Job long to realize he stepped out into water way too deep for him. And we also find ourselves out of our depth at times—thinking we're doing just fine and being good little girls and boys in the sight of the Lord. It's helpful to read these last few chapters of Job from time to time—a reminder of where we really stand in respect to our self-satisfaction and presumed wisdom and knowledge. When God finishes questioning Job, he responds with the wisest words he's spoken thus far: *“I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted.... I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore, I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”* (Job 42:2, 5-6)

We delude ourselves if we ever think we have no need of repentance. The psalmist in Psalm 90 prays, *“Thou has set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.”* (verse 8) Day by day we are called to confess our sins. In so doing, we acknowledge God's sovereignty over us, maintain a proper relationship with the Lord, and receive forgiveness, grace and mercy. We are set free by Christ Himself—*“if the Son makes you free you are free indeed.”* (John 8:36) As Luther says in the explanation on what Baptism means for our daily lives Small Catechism: *“our sinful self ... should be drowned through daily repentance, and ... day after day a new self should arise to live with God in righteousness and purity forever.”*

Pastor Barbara 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
Boyd: St. John, Pr. Mark Lund
Dorchester: Waterloo Ridge, Call Process
Eagle Grove: Evangelical Lutheran, Pr. Jason Cooper
Eagle Grove: Samuel Lutheran, Pr. Rich Taylor
Ellsworth: Trinity, Pastor Jon Rollefson
Emmons, MN: Emmons, Pr. David Schafer, Interim
Gilmore City: First, Tracy Nerem, Lay Minister
Grafton: Emmanuel, Pr. Solveig Zamzow
Greene: St. John (Vilmar), Pr. Christopher Martin
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. Dave 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
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. Olaf: Norway, Pr. Marshall Hahn
Sheldon: St. Paul, Pr. Crai
+Sibley: Faith, Pr. Tim Nappe
Spencer: Trinity
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 following pastors are available for pulpit supply:

Pastor Paul Breddin—515--528-2284
Pastor James Glesne—563-380-8110
Pastor David Steffenson—253-302-9845 (Sundays)
Pastor Paul Weeg- -641-381-0675

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Pastor Burkhalter, Treasurer—
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Kathy Scharnhorst—
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Mission District Communicator
(newsletter editor/web master):
Pastor Barbara Wills—barbaramwills@gmail.com



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