



News

of the Iowa Mission District of the North American Lutheran Church



www.iowamissiondistrict.com

April 2024

A Word from the Dean

In lieu of Pastor Staley's usual article, he is sharing a message from our sisters and brother of First Grace Lutheran Church in Osage, our newest mission congregation:

We're Here and We're Excited

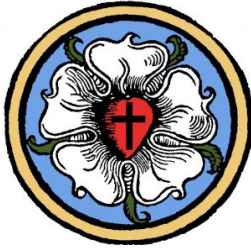
Our church historically was a place where Christians, regardless of political persuasion, could worship and focus on GOD. On October 21, 2022 6th-9th graders attended an ELCA sponsored youth lock-in at UNI. At this event, children were asked to claim their gender-identity and sexual orientation, they were directed to celebrate/glorify all sexual preferences and genders and were led in a blessing of "Mother God" instead of God the Father. After this event, led by two young mothers, many congregants started looking into the ELCA and many things were discovered including the change to a political agenda on every political topic rather than a focus on GOD and the BIBLE. We just wanted to have our church return to the BIBLE like our ancestors who built this church worshiped— instead, we were labeled as "gay haters".

Many of us have family and friends who are gay and this was very hurtful. What was once thought to be a church family started to turn against each other. Never would we have thought that the pastors and other congregants whom I felt were very religious and good people would turn against the BIBLE, their church family and the church's historic teachings so easily. They were removing controversial information that was coming from the ELCA out of the Sunday School curriculum for quite a long time, but no one knew. Many members had chosen to leave instead of trying to change the church. Our Synod Bishop even visited our congregation and agreed with our concerns and told us that we needed to come together as a congregation to talk about things. After almost a year of struggling and not being allowed to share with the congregation our concerns because of the Pastor's telling the congregation "it is misinformation", a vote was taken. A little more than 50% voted to remain in the ELCA.

With the help and support from a nearby community NALC church, First Lutheran Church of St. Ansgar, Iowa, and Pastor Staley, many congregants had begun gathering together to worship at a community center since May of 2023. After the outcome of the vote, we decided to begin the process of becoming a congregation of the NALC, with that being formalized on November 9th. Since then, we have become First Grace Lutheran Church of Osage, Iowa. We have set up committees and have begun work on building a new church community. We literally had nothing to start our church—No altar items, no Bibles, no hymnals, no Sunday school curriculum, no costumes for the Christmas Program....nothing. Just followers of Christ.

Since becoming a Mission Plant, we have had so many blessings! God is truly leading us and guiding us every step. We are a small group but we have many children and young families and that is why we need to do this. First in St Ansgar has been willing to share their pastor with us since May of 2022. If we did not have this support, I am not sure we would exist today. Someone from that congregation anonymously donated a brand new electronic piano so that we could have music in our worship services. Our local movie theater let us use their facility for our Christmas Eve Service so that our children could have a Christmas Program. We were looking for LBWs and asked our previous church if we could have theirs that were in storage. When it became clear that there was resistance there, we posted our need on the NALC Fellowship Facebook Page and the response was overwhelming. Within hours, we heard all the way from California, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and 110 arrived within a few days from Immanuel Lutheran in Easton, CA, with their pastor, Taylor Stempniak, covering the shipping cost. And now a similar call for With One Voice hymnals has had a similar response with more than a hundred coming from Hope Lutheran in Ladysmith, WI, and St. John Lutheran in Greenville, OH. And Pastor John Saethre, who has helped preach when Pastor Staley is gone, brought a monetary gift from Emmanuel Lutheran in Rochester, MN. In addition, land has been donated by one of our members to build a new church and we are starting to put money away for a new church. So our journey is set before us as we start raising funds for a new permanent worship home for our new church family.

We are excited to be a part of the Iowa Mission District of the NALC and have already been made to feel very welcome and supported. We would ask for your continued prayers, and would welcome any benevolence dollars that you have collected to support mission congregations. These may be mailed to us at PO Box 143, Osage, IA, 50461.



Three Blind Sons

*Pastor Ben Unseth
Faith Lutheran Church
Spencer, Iowa*

Once there were two blind sons. They were blind to their father's love and to his blessing in their lives. The younger brother decided: *Life is somewhere else, and it's good there.* Whatever rotten thing you could think of to say about this rebel was probably true. He wanted his father's money rather than a relationship with this man who loved him. He wasted his entire inheritance—all of it. He broke every family and religious rule. He disgraced his family name.

As you know, he came home humbly. Before he even reached the house, the first blind son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:21).

Father responded with exuberance and lavish love. "'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate." (Luke 15:22-24).

The father in this parable obviously represents our heavenly Father. We, however, do not always represent him well. After public shame, friends of mine were told by their pastor, "Your child can come to church...if your child sits in the back row." There are no back-row Christians! God has no bastard children! Every Christian belongs in God's heart. This is the love of God!

The older brother appears to have decided on a much more successful life strategy: *Life is here—I will do my duty...even if I am unloved.* He too is blind to his father's love and blessing. "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.'" (Luke 15:28-29).

Many Christians slip into the older brother's rut,

thinking: Life is here—and tough, unloved. I have been both sons, but mostly the older one. I was the third blind son. When I was 12 years old, I switched my praying from "Dear God" to "Dear Father" because I did not want my father. At 17, I made an appointment to talk with my dad about choosing a college. I walked into his office, sat down, and had a formal conversation. At 20, I had graduated from community college, and Dad drove me down to Interstate 94 where I began my hitchhiking trek to college. He shook my hand and said goodbye. I did not feel loved.

At 29, I rejoiced in my first child! Two and a half months later, I walked upstairs to pick up Spencer from his nap, but he was dead. My world collapsed. The next day friends drove me 400 miles to my parents' house. For the first time I could remember, my dad wrapped me in his arms. My father had not changed. He had always loved me, but I was blind to his love until that day.

Dad had a car accident when he was 90 and began hospice care. My five brothers each came to see him. Two thousand miles away, I was the last to arrive. Through tears Dad told me, "I've been waiting for you to come." I stayed with Dad and Mom a couple days. To my astonishment, when I kissed him for the first time since my boyhood, he kissed me back.

In Luke 15:31, the loving father tells the older "unloved" son, "You are always with me, and everything I have is yours"! I think that these are God's words to you.

Paul prays for his brothers and sisters "to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:19). He declares, "In Christ you have been brought to fullness." (Colossians 2:10). John agrees, "Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given." (John 1:15).

Our loving Father declares, "You are always with me, and everything I have is yours"!

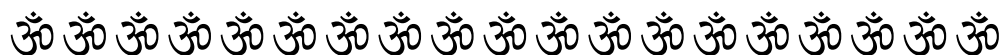
This and That From Around the Iowa Mission District



Pastor Christian Meier was sworn into the United States Army Reserves as a military chaplain on February 2, 2024. Colonel Sonya Morrison, Wing Commander of the 185th Air Refueling Wing, Iowa Air National Guard, administered the Oath of Office. Pastor Chris serves St. John Lutheran Church, LaMars, Iowa.



IA Mission District Secretary, Pastor Solveig Zamzow, confirmed the Class of 2024 at St. John's Lutheran Church, Western Douglas, on March 17th. The students are shown here with their teachers, Dawn Bergman and Stephanie Riekenberg. Although vacant for almost two years, the congregation continues to educate their many children including—67 children in Sunday School—with the gracious help of faithful volunteers. Pastor Zamzow serves the congregation as frequent Supply Preacher.







SPRING RETREAT

weekend

Hosted by: Eagle Grove Evangelical Lutheran Church
April 12th-14th | Students 7th-12th grade
Eagle Grove, Iowa

Register Now!



https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIPQLSCZUA-EQJAUXCIRY870EGBYOEWHK8BZVXUKIFVW_MTL2VIEP-A/VIEWFORM?USP=SF_LINK

Upcoming Youth Opportunities

Spring Retreat—grades 7-12

NEXUS—grades 9-12



The NALC is sponsoring NEXUS again this year. This is for high school students who might be considering a call to ministry—or who might be encouraged to consider such a call.



Pondering the Parables: The Pearl of Great Price

[Jesus said] *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”*

(Matthew 13:45-46 NKJV)

What’s it going to cost me? We live in a society in which there is great concern about money and the price of things. We once had a dear friend who would drive miles out of his way to save a few pennies on his gasoline (although I’m not sure he factored in the cost of the gas it took to get to the other station), and another friend who always made sure she got the “Senior Discount” at McDonalds, even if she was purchasing no more than the small-sized drink. For some, this fixation on saving even a few pennies may have come from being raised during the Great Depression when money was scarce, and most of us have legitimate concerns about having enough money to pay our bills and provide for our families. But I suspect that this fixation for getting as much as we can for as little cost as possible may have as much to do with our human desire to make sure we get our “fair share”—and possibly a bit more—as it does with having enough money to meet our financial obligations. Advertisers take advantage of this human desire by offering “bargains” (which may not live up to their promises); and the popularity of “rewards cards” and discount coupons testify to this same human tendency.

When it comes to our faith, we sometimes find this same question coming into play: *“What’s it going to cost me?”* Whether the question has to do with our personal financial stewardship practices, or our allocation of time and energy expended in the living out of our faith, the question is usually there, though not always recognized. Whether we’re talking about time spent in Bible study and prayer, worship, or service to others, the bottom line is often, “How much?” How much time? How much money? How much of myself?”

This is not a modern trend, nor is it peculiar to our capitalistic culture. Jesus often encountered it among the people to whom He ministered while he walked the roads of Palestine 2,000 years ago. We remember the rich young man who asked Jesus, *“What must I do...?”* When Jesus told him he had to give up everything, he walked away. (Matthew 9:16-22; Mark 10:17-22) When Jesus told His disciples that those who love their lives in this world would lose them, and that those who hated their lives in this world would keep them for eternity, He was talking about the cost of being His disciple. (John 12:25) The parable of the “pearl of great price” is a very short parable, similar to the one

about the mustard seed. These are “kingdom” parables—“The kingdom of heaven” (or the “kingdom of God”) is like.... It’s like nothing on earth. It starts out so small one can barely see it, and it becomes the greatest thing one could imagine. It is more costly than anything we can think of—costing our whole selves, not just a bit of time or money. But it’s worth the price—and more!

As we ponder this parable of the pearl, it’s not quite as simple as it seems. I suspect that because this parable is short and seemingly straightforward, we may tend to read it, wonder about someone who would sell everything to own it, and let it go at that. But if we scratch the surface just a bit, we’ll find something much more valuable than a fabulous pearl. How we understand the kingdom of heaven makes a huge difference in how we hear this parable. I suspect that most often people think of the kingdom of heaven as a “place” where there is peace and where one would prefer to be for eternity, as opposed to hell, which is most often depicted as a fiery furnace. But if we listen to Jesus at the very beginning of His ministry, we might pause to consider a little different definition. In Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:14 Jesus begins His ministry with the invitation to repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. The kingdom of heaven is in our midst where Jesus is present. *“Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, [Jesus] answered them, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, “Lo, here it is!” or “There!” for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.’”* (Luke 17:20-21)

In the final analysis, the question of “How much will it cost me?” is irrelevant when we speak of our relationship with the Lord. God the Father did not count the cost of His own sacrifice when He sent His dearly beloved, only begotten, Son to pay the price for our sin so that we might be with Him forever. Jesus, Son of the Father, did not count the cost when He chose to live in obedience to His Father’s will and bore the weight of human sin so that we might be drawn into His and the Father’s love. It’s not a transaction. It’s a matter of who—and Whose—we are. It’s a matter of where our true Treasure is found. It’s a matter of being who we were created to be—beloved children of God created in His image to live in His love forever. The great yearning of God the Father has always been to have His sons and daughters return home—to return to His love and live in His grace. When we recognize this Pearl beyond price, offered to us through the death and resurrection of our dearest Lord Jesus, we will quit “counting” and rush into His arms of mercy.

Pastor Barbara M. Wills

Announcements

Upcoming Events

April 12-14 - Spring Retreat Weekend—Eagle Grove Lutheran Church for students in grades 7-12. For more information contact Alana DeMoss, Mission District Youth coordinator at fivekids crazy@outlook.com

June 10-11—Iowa Mission District Pastor's/Lay Minister's Retreat—Best Western Holiday Lodge, Clear Lake, Iowa. Begins at 1:00 pm June 10th, concludes at noon June 11.

July 21-27, 2024—NEXUS Institute—at Grand View University, Des Moines. The week is being sponsored by the NALC. For more information: <http://www.grandview.edu/NEXUS>

August 9, 2024—NALC online Convocation—all day meeting online

September 21, 2024—Iowa Mission District Convocation—St. John, Western Douglas

Please Pray for:

Pastor James Puotyal who is awaiting a kidney transplant.

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

NALC Office
P.O. Box 130455
St. Paul, MN 55113

Please send **donations** to this address:

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

Donations to NALS, Disaster Relief, Great Commission Society, etc. are to be made out to the NALC with the specific fund written on the memo line of your check.

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 Pastor Solveig Zamzow, Mission District Secretary, should be sent to **619 Elm Avenue, #309, Story City, IA 50248**

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

Pastors available for pulpit supply:

Pastor Natacha Kemp—507-785-0412
Pastor Jack Miller—507-798-2408
Pastor Mike Wikstrom—480-203-1556
Pastor Solveig Zamzow—641-903-9416



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

Mission District Pulpit-Supply Guidelines

In October of 2022, the Mission District Council voted to recommend that congregations pay a visiting pastor \$200 for a worship service in addition to the current IRS mileage rate. At a subsequent meeting, we also decided to recommend that congregations do the same for a visiting pastor who performs a wedding or a funeral. Any honorarium that the family might want to give to the pastor would not be deducted from this, as the pastor is providing a service to the congregation. We also recommend that a congregation which has more than one worship service in a day, pay an additional \$50 to the pastor for each additional service. (The current IRS rate is \$0.67 per mile, but changes nearly every year.)



Congregations of the Iowa Mission District

Ackley: **Our Saviour's**, Dan Buhs, Lay Minister
Avoca: **Trinity**, Pastor Matthew Bahnfleth
Badger: **Badger Lutheran**, Pr. Scott Meier
Boyden: **St. John**, Pr. Jeremy Winter
Des Moines: **Unity Evangelical Lutheran**,
Pr. Donna Joseph; Pr. Diane Joseph
Dorchester: **Waterloo Ridge**, Pr. James Glesne
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**, Call Process
Greene: **St. John (Vilmar)**, Pr. Tamara Keen
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
LeMars: **St. John**, Pr. Chris Meier
Manchester: **First**, Call Process
Monona, **Faith**: Pr. Mel Harris
Northwood: **Peace**, Pr. Barbara Wills
+ Osage: **First Grace Lutheran Church**
Palmer: **St. John's Lizard Township**,
Marlene Nimke, Lay Minister
Plainfield: **St. John**, Call Process
Readlyn: **St. Matthew**, Pr. Jean Rabary
Readlyn: **Zion**, Pr. Jean Rabary
Robins: **Servants of Christ**, Pr. Ronald Voss
+Rochester, MN: **Emmanuel**—Call Process
Ruthven: **Zion**, Eric Patten, Lay Minister
St. Ansgar: **First**, Pr. Christopher Staley
+ St. Charles, MN: **Trinity**, Pr. Douglas Hedman
St. Olaf: **Norway**, Pr. Marshall Hahn
Sheldon: **St. Paul**, Pr. John Jensen, Interim
Spencer: **Trinity**, Pr. Renae Behrends
Strawberry Pt.: **Mission in Christ**, Call Process
Thor: **Ullensvang**, Pr. Darryl Landsverk
Waterville: **Old East Paint Creek**, Pr. Ken Kimball
Waukon: **Old West Paint Creek**, Pr. Ken Kimball

+ indicates mission congregation

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Pastor Burkhalter, Treasurer
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