



THE PILGRIM HERALD

January 2017

PILGRIM EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

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JANUARY: GIVING OUT OF GRACE

“Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace!”
[2 Cor 8:6; on the Jerusalem Collection]

By now you have received a letter informing you of our budget shortfall. No matter how you look at this, it’s a difficult subject. Not just because it involves money, but also the seat of the heart’s flesh and its brutal encounter with the 1st Commandment. Even in the best of circumstances speaking about and encouraging all of us to be fiscally responsible, to think about one’s donations to the church, is a knotty issue even under the best of circumstances. The needs are seemingly endless. There are so many competing voices and ideas as to how to “fix” the problem. Various voices put forth their pleas for money, approaching it at countless different angles. Rest assured, a host of biblical teachings and theological convictions will always keep us from being a “money church,” and also one that attempts to guilt you into giving more by elaborate schemes. What you should know is that this is nothing new. The church has always struggled with money, its collection and its dispersal.

In his own day, St. Paul faced similar challenges. He spent close to 10 years seeking funds for what is commonly referred to as the Jerusalem collection (Acts 15:36—21:16). Paul talks about this collection effort in many of his epistles (Rom 15:26-27; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9). This was a collection among the Gentile churches to help Judean believers who were facing harder than usual economic times as a result of a famine during the mid to late A.D. 40s. Paul and Barnabas made an initial famine relief-visit to Jerusalem in A.D. 46 and delivered a monetary gift from the church at Antioch (Acts 11:29-30). The collection effort was successfully completed in A.D. 57, and the funds were delivered by Paul and a group of delegates chosen by the contrib-

uting Gentile churches.

The Jerusalem collection was first and foremost an *act of charity*. Famine on top of persistent food shortages, double taxation and overpopulation crippled an already precarious Palestinian economy. Furthermore, the Jerusalem collection served as a visible expression of the interdependence of believers, of the *fellowship* we have together as members of the body of Christ. All of life is included in the shared concerns of those who are baptized into Christ. Not to be forgotten is that the collection was a tangible expression of the heart of the gospel, of *grace*.

Two whole chapters of Paul’s second letter to the church at Corinth are devoted to the Jerusalem relief fund. In these chapters we learn that the Corinthians were the first church not only to give but indeed to have a desire to do so. This suggests that Paul must have made the Corinthians aware of the relief fund on his first visit, for a little over a year later the church asked for his counsel on the best way to go about saving up such monies (1 Cor 16:1). His advice at the time was to do as he had instructed the Galatian churches: each person should set aside a sum of money every week *in keeping with his or her income*. In this way, no collections would have to be made on Paul’s next visit. The belief that each person could do this shows that most people had surplus income. But it must not have been a very great surplus, since week-by-week savings were necessary for the contribution to be a generous one in the end.

Paul was no “fundraising guru.” Notice very carefully that in these chapters Paul makes no direct appeal for funds. In fact, Paul does not even once use the term “money.” His approach is grace filled not law demanding. In his book, *Christ Have Mercy: How to Put Your Faith in Action*,

Matthew Harrison notes the following after a study of St. Paul's efforts.

"True stewardship became clear. He uses grace to describe the collection in 2 Corinthians 8:6. The most significant word of the New Testament, *grace*, is used for collected money! That was shocking. St. Paul's words began a complete revolution in my thinking about the Church and money, or should I say, the Church, money, and *mercy*." (pg. 142-143)

Taking a closer look at 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, Paul outlines the procedure. "On the first day of every week, each of you is to *put something aside* and store it up, as he may prosper, *so that there will be no collecting when I come*" (Italics mine). So, each member, no matter how poor, should put "something aside." The point here is to give something in proportion to one's income. Paul is instructing each to set aside a portion of his income, not the entire amount. Moreover, Paul doesn't target his appeal to the wealthy members of the congregation. Rather, he calls upon all to participate in accordance with their ability. Paul encouraged regular giving; a mindfulness of God's generosity to them, and in faith and love, a gift to support and care for their neighbor. Indeed, there is no stipulation that the Christians were obligated to donate a necessitated amount. It was simply an amount that came forth from one's prosperity that the Lord had given to them out of grace. Small, medium, large, all the sums would soon amount to a great sum. Whatever the gift, Paul would find it waiting for him. There would be no personal pressure by making some last-minute appeal, and the Corinthians would be spared having to rustle up their wallets for whatever they could find. Paul instructs them to take up the collection before he arrives so that they do not have to scramble to collect in the

short time he is there. Also, instead of going door to door begging for money, Paul will be able to spend his time on more important things, like preaching of Gospel, the pastoral care of the church.

I must admit that Paul's focus on the gospel and pastoral care is an admonishment to me, and to all who have and are continued to be fixated over the lack of needed offerings here at the church. This is not to suggest some sort of fatalism, like an ostrich that is prone to put its head in the sand, or standing in the middle of a burning building and with a cheerful voice saying, "It will be ok." The church does have left hand kingdom responsibilities and realities that must be met; electricity, upkeep of our properties, and countless other things that often don't cross one's mind but cannot be neglected. I grant, there is a fine line here between being confident that the Lord will and does provide all our needs of body and soul, and the need to support the ministry of the Gospel here in this place.

In a day and age where the church is in decline, where the economy is depressed, and many have strayed and have completely disappeared from the church's care, we are hard pressed on every side. But, let me be very clear: pastors and people don't grow the church. God does according to the mysterious will and power of His Spirit. Pastors and people don't crack the knees and knuckles of small-time givers and cozily rub shoulders with big-time givers. Pastors and people simply encourage out of grace regular giving. Not giving from the heart, for the heart will always be stingy, self-centered and lacking in fear, love, and trust, to give what it always wants to hoard. No. Rather, what pastors and people encourage is giving out of the wellspring of grace. To give in the cheerful response of the church's gifts doled out to you by her pastors that comfort your body and soul, now and until Christ

ushers you into His eternal and everlasting kingdom.

I leave you with a few more words from Harrison's book, *Christ Have Mercy*: "Where the Church ceases to be merciful it misses the stewardship boat. We dare not miss the New Testament's main goal of giving—care for the poor and suffering in our midst. The apostolic promise still holds good today: 'You will be enriched in every way for your generosity' (2 Corinthians 9:11)."

In Christ and His Love,
Pastor Raffa

Pilgrim Ev. Lutheran Church, Council Minutes,
December 12, 2016.

Meeting was called to order by President Jerry Sommer at 7:02 PM.

Present were Pastor Fisher, Pastor Raffa, Jerry Sommer, Fred Leffin, David Boehlke, Mary Schwittau, Judy Frank, Jim Behrens. (Absent: Susan Stadlemayer, Scott Densow, Tanner Schmidt, Carolyn McAfee)

Pastor Fisher opened with prayer.

President Jerry Sommer asked for any corrections to the last minutes of November 14, 2016. They were approved as printed.

Elders Report: Pastor Fisher reported that they have set the schedule for the holidays. There was extensive discussion on the Tuition Assistance program and the omissions that have occurred. A letter to the congregation was received from Pastor Raffa and his family regarding this problem. The Tuition Assistance and the Minister's Salaries will be added to the agenda for the Congregational Voter's Assembly meeting, January 29, 2017. A motion was made by David Boehlke and seconded by Mary Schwittau for approval to set the Housing Allowance up to 50% for the pastors. It was passed unanimously.

Trustees Report: David Boehlke stated that there was a list of unfunded projects in the December newsletter and so far no one had come forward with an offer to pay for one. Ron Virchow will attend the Council meetings next year.

Board of Education Report: Pastor Fisher reported that the Sunday School students are working on the Christmas program.

Pastors report: Pastor Fisher stated that St. Andrews Lutheran Church is calling Rev. Michael Larson of Wittenberg, WI.

President Jerry Sommer lead discussion and presented the two changes of the language in the Constitution and By-laws to make it more concise. The motion to accept these changes was made by Judy Frank and seconded by David Boehlke. It was passed unanimously. This will also be presented at the January Congregational Voters meeting.

A letter was received from a member of our congregation concerning our financial debt, "Can we all do a little more?" and will be printed in the newsletter.

A big "Thank You" to Scott Densow, Mary Schwittau and Ken Frank for their services these past years.

A question about the Raffle Sale, Silent Auction, Christmas Shoppe has been tabled to the next meeting. The concern is about holding this event in the church and a conflict with our church doctrine and practicing what we teach.

Pastor Raffa closed the meeting with prayer.

Fred Leffin made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Judy Frank

Sunday



School

*Sympathy
Understand*

Our Christmas Program "To Us A Child Is Born" was presented on Sunday, December 18th. The children did a great job presenting this message. Thanks also to the children who sang during the morning worship services. We take this opportunity to thank the children and their parents for the extra effort in memorizing parts, songs/hymns, and coming to the extra rehearsals. We also thank Pastor Fisher, Pastor Raffa, Sarah Spalda, Samuel Grosskreuz, all of the teachers, and everyone who helped with the program and Chili Supper and gift bags. Thank you Samuel Boehlke and Joseph Heger for special music.

After a break for Christmas and New Year's Day, Sunday School resumes January 8th at 9:15 a.m. Our Bible stories will be from the New Testament.

Jesus Changes Water into Wine

John 2:1-11

Jesus Clears the Temple

John 2:13-22

Jesus Teaches Nicodemus

John 3:1-21

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

John 4:1-42

New Offering Envelopes have been distributed for 2017. Numbers have changed. Please write your name on your 2017 envelopes. Please discard any old envelopes.

SYMPATHY AND PRAYERS to Clara Meyer on the death of her husband Rev. David Meyer. Pastor Meyer was called home to Jesus on December 21, 2016.

SUNDAY SCHOOL will resume on Sunday, January 8th.

PLEASE REMEMBER TO renew your Thrivent Choice Dollars Designation for 2016. This must be done yearly. Thank you.

CHRISTMAS SHOPPE - If you would like the items you had donated to the Christmas Shoppe, please pick them up by January 9. If not picked up they will be donated to the Bethesda shop in Horicon.

Dear Pilgrim members,

Time has gone quickly since we've left Wisconsin and life continues to hold its challenges but we are loving California. We so appreciated your kind words, hugs and best wishes as we said farewell for now.

We can't believe it is so close to Christmas without us experiencing cold weather and snow. Just want you to know we will always treasure our time at Pilgrim and the fellowship we shared. The dedication of Pastor Fisher and Pastor Raffa is irreplaceable and we're slowly seeking another LCMS home. A blessed Christmas and Happy 2017! With all our heartfelt love, **Margie and Allen Latall, 100 N. River Circle Unit 102, Oceanside, CA 92057**

Daily Lectionary

This outline is a devotional reading plan that covers the entire Sacred Scriptures each year. The selections are based on ancient models and are generally in harmony with the liturgical church year. The average reading is three chapters daily. The lectionary is in accordance with Martin Luther's suggestions: "But let the entire Psalter, divided in parts, remain in use and the entire Scriptures, divided into lections, let this be preserved in the ears of the church." Also: "After that another book should be selected, and so on, until the entire Bible has been read through, and where one does not understand it, pass that by and glorify God."

JANUARY'S READINGS –

Jan. 1 - Luke 1: 68-79

Mark 2

Jan. 2 - Psalm 30

Mark 3

Jan. 3 - Psalm 31

Mark 4

Jan. 4 - Psalm 32

Mark 5

Jan. 5 - Psalm 33

Mark 6

Jan. 6 - Psalm 34

Mark 7

Jan. 7 - Psalm 35

Mark 8

Jan. 8 - Psalm 36

Mark 9

Jan. 9 - Psalm 37

Mark 10

Jan. 10 - Psalm 38

Mark 11

Jan. 11 - Psalm 39

Mark 12

Jan. 12 - Psalm 40

Mark 13

Jan. 13 - Psalm 41

Mark 14

Jan. 14 - Psalm 42

Mark 15 - 16

Jan. 15 - Psalm 43

Genesis 1 - 3

Jan. 16 - Psalm 44

Genesis 4-6

Jan. 17 - Psalm 45

Genesis 7 - 9

Jan. 18 - Psalm 46

Genesis 10 - 12

Jan. 19 - Psalm 47

Genesis 13-15

Jan. 20 - Psalm 48

Genesis 16 - 18

Jan. 21 - Psalm 49

Genesis 19 - 21

Jan. 22 - Psalm 50

Genesis 22 - 24

Jan. 23 - Psalm 51

Genesis 25 - 27

Jan. 24 - Psalm 52

Genesis 28 - 30

Jan. 25 - Psalm 53

Genesis 31 - 33

Jan. 26 - Psalm 54

Genesis 34 - 36

Jan. 27 - Psalm 55

Genesis 37 - 39

Jan. 28 - Psalm 56

Genesis 40 - 42

Jan. 29 - Psalm 57

Genesis 43 - 45

Jan. 30 - Psalm 58

Genesis 46 - 48

Jan. 31 - Luke 1: 68 -79

Genesis 49 - 50



JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

- 2- Steven Wiedmeyer
Rev. Christopher Raffa
- 4- James Hanson
- 5- Inez Schwoch
Mikayla Wicke
- 7- Betty Schneeweis
- 8- Anne-Marie Gierach
Chloe Skrentny
Chevelle Madison
- 9- Samantha Spalda
Shawn Daley
- 10- Carl Steiner, Jr.
- 11- Dylan Zehetner
Ian Zehetner
- 13- Arlene Zicker
- 15- Olivemae Olson
Shelby Hepner
Dan Schmidt
Aubri Held
- 16- Cynthia Kemeny
- 17- Richard Spiering
Tyler Jakubowski
Anna Haas
- 18- Kenneth Heckendorf
Ross Hausmann

- 19- Michael Olson
Natalie Baker
- 20- Cindy Wiedmeyer
- 21- Nicole Zehetner
- 23- Brenda Doyle
Gary Knuth
Theresa Baerenwald
Julee Haas
- 24- Jeff Schneeweis
- 25- Paul Liermann
- 27- Albert Frank
Patrick Horlamus
Sheryl Pajewski
- 30- Terry Mowery
David Moenning



ANNIVERSARIES

- 19- Michael & Lorna Olson
- 25- Michael & Mary Schwittau
- 29- Donald & Janet Meisenheimer
- 31- Brian & Pamela Nitzke

YEAR END REPORTS

Pilgrim Ev. Lutheran Church
Board of Education – Sunday School
2016 Annual Report

January-May 2016

We started the year by continuing our New Testament lessons with a “Happy Birthday Jesus” party. We enjoyed our music time, celebrated the January birthdays of four, watched a video (“The Birth of Jesus”), played bible trivia, and enjoyed cupcakes and juice. We also welcomed four new students.

In March we were able to sing during a worship service. Several students also sang at the Easter Vigil.

May was a very busy month in Sunday School: 3 & 4 years olds created “Prayer Booklets” and made hand print flowers for Mother’s Day, 1st & 2nd graders and 5th & 6th graders painted flower pots. On Mother’s Day they took them home with marigolds inside. Our thanks to Cheryl Virchow for her help with this wonderful project. Third and Fourth graders were seen with a fishing pond in their room. They also learned more about the church year and created some interesting decorations for our year round Christmas tree. Artificial flower bouquets were created for Mother’s Day. Several classes viewed videos as a Bible story telling alternative. The 2015-2016 Sunday School year ended on May 22nd. We recognized summer birthdays and presented Attendance Awards.

September-December 2016

We began the 2016-2017 Sunday School year with thirty-five students and two new teachers. Our focus was on Old Testament Bible stories. We gained several new students in October.

To Us a Child Is Born was the title of our December 18th Christmas Program.

We learned several new songs and hymns. The program was followed with a Chili Supper and the singing of carols which was enjoyed by many families as well as congregation members.

Respectfully submitted by
Diane E. Swanson
Sunday School Superintendent

ALTAR GUILD 2016 YEAR END REPORT

During 2016 the altar guild with the guidance of Pastor Fisher and Pastor Raffa assisted in the preparation of all the church services which have all served communion with the exception of Good Friday and the sunrise service on Easter morning. This included cleaning of the altar and sacristy areas. Setting up for communion and baptisms, caring for communion linens, stoles, lectern and pulpit hangings and banners. Together we worked sponsoring a Lenten meal, Easter breakfast and have decorated for Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. we also worked together to prepare the altar for our new Holy Saturday Vigil. We would like to extend our thanks to the Trustees for their help throughout the year but especially for the cleaning of the stained glass windows at the altar; to Paul and Barbara Soat for donating and decorating the beautiful swags that now hang on the pillars in the sanctuary; and to Orville and Janey Heckendorf for their memorial donation to be used towards new altar linens. We would like to invite any confirmed member of Pilgrim who would be interested in joining the altar guild to please contact any member. The current members are: Becky Boehlke, Rita Frank, Ruth Kohler, pat Knuth, Laurie Lotz, Carolyn McAfee, Bonnie Mowery, Julie Raffa, Nancy Rosenthal, Ginny Schober, Karen Spiering, Suzanne Stadelmayer, Cheryl Thill and Norma Benz. Officers for 2017 are: Carolyn McAfee- president Julie Raffa

vice president and Bonnie Mowery- Treasurer I would also like to thank Pastor Fisher, Pastor Raffa and all of the altar guild members for all of the support, guidance, and suggestions given to me this year.

Submitted by

Ginny Schober outgoing president

LADIES GUILD/LWML

ANNUAL REPORT 2016

The purpose of our organization is to serve the Lord with gladness and to aid our congregation in any way we can. We continue to support the LWML with our Mite Boxes and offerings at our Rallies. We support Missionary/Pastor Micah Wildauer who is serving in Togo, Africa. We also thank the congregation for their support.

One of our highlights of 2016 was hosting a Surprise Baby Shower for the Raffa's to welcome beautiful Emma Ruth. Several of our ladies attended the Prayer Service held at Cascade and the Spring Rally held at Sherman Center. The Guild served the supper for Ash Wednesday service.

In April we cleaned out the church kitchen. And in June, we had fun at our grill out/picnic. Games and white elephant gifts were enjoyed by all.

In June, we sent two delegates to the Convention held at the Madison Marriott. They voted for the charitable agencies that would receive grants funded by the Mite Offerings.

In August, the Young Women's LWML Event was held at Pilgrim.

In October, we hosted the Zone 7 Fall Rally. Our speaker, Trish Kagerbauer was so very inspiring as she spoke of our Lord's command to value life at all stages. We thank all who contributed to A Place of Refuge.

We are always ready to serve meals for funerals here at Pilgrim. We want to thank all members of our congregation who have helped us in preparing and serving meals, baked desserts, and helped clean up.

Our Christmas Cookie Sale is always enjoyable and helps in supporting our Missionary/Pastor Wildauer. In Dec., we have our Christmas Dinner Party. We give thanks to God for the many blessings He has given to us including our Pastors, Sarah, and our congregation of believers. We look forward to serving our Lord in 2017.

The 2017 officers are...

President—Ruth Kohler

Vice President—Julie Raffa

Secretary—Norma Benz

Treasurer—Beverly Hanson

Christian Growth—Beverly Hanson

Sunshine Chairman—Barbara Jennrich

All ladies of the congregation are encouraged and invited to join us as we begin the New Year.

Respectfully Submitted,
Ruth Kohler
President

Dear Christian friends and partners in mission: Merry Christmas! We invite you to read the latest from our life and work in the Dominican Republic. In addition to the news and updates below, we plan to send you additional photos now and then to keep you informed of God's progress among us. We hope that your home is aglow this Christmastide with the good news of Jesus, our Immanuel. Comfort, peace, and joy be yours in Christ, our universal Savior!

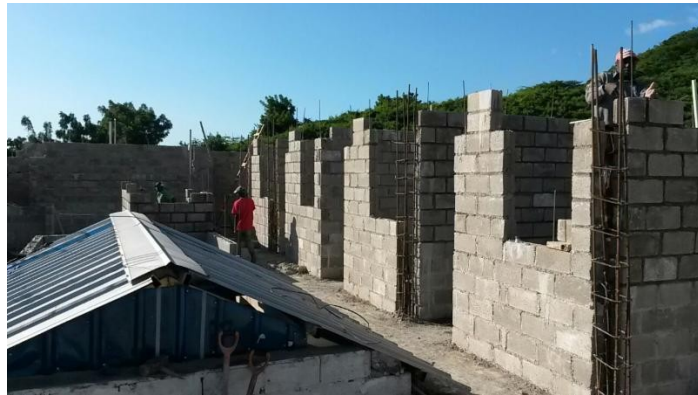
Slow, but steady progress...

Landing on the Dominican mission field has been like wading through a fast-flowing current while trying to keep our balance. Every little step requires careful attention as we seek to adjust and adapt to our new life. The other day during morning coffee, Jenny made the comparison of how life here so far feels like what you always hear on the airplane before take-off: *Please put on your own oxygen mask before securing your child's.* That's kind of how it feels moving your family to the mission-field...we must overcome many hurdles as we secure our own family's "oxygen mask" while simultaneously participating in the mission work among the people and churches here! (Hopefully, this is where the airplane comparison ends and we are not headed for any crash-landings along the way.) Our house is becoming more functional with each week that goes by. One of our favorite features includes a fully enclosed roof [pictured] with a nice view of the city and the mountains surrounding the Cibao valley. So far we have visited three potential schools for the children, one of which they will begin attending in the fall. I have learned how to drive "Dominican-style" which seems like a whole new set of road-rules most of the time. We are also becoming more oriented when finding our way around the city of Santiago and surrounding areas. At the end of each day, Jenny, the kids, and I reflect on so many of the fascinating cultural observations made that day. I am also continuing with daily Spanish lessons and have also had opportunity to preach four times (en español), as well as assist with visitations and liturgy at various services.



The new seminary in Palmar Arriba

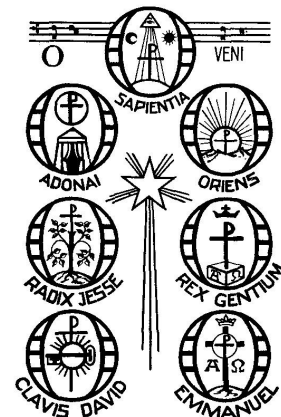
Now that the rains have subsided, the mercy training center and seminary construction is moving along. We are looking at some huge developments here. Starting this summer, students will arrive from all parts of Latin America to study at our seminary. To prepare, we have been having weekly strategic planning meetings to discuss plans to ensure a strong start to the academic year. By God's grace, we are going to offer our seminarians a fine theological education,



preparing future pastors to plant churches in the region. Educated Lutheran pastors will be the most fundamental building block for the future of the Latin American Lutheran Church.

A Dominican Christmas...

It is a very exciting time of year down here. The festivities are swelling until they culminate in Christmas Day when the families of the land get together in celebration and the country literally closes down. Our churches have also been celebrating the seven days leading up to Christmas by gathering for a short Vespers service revolving around the "O antiphons" from the old Advent hymn, "O Come, o come, Emmanuel." On Monday, I preached a sermon on Christ the Root of Jesse. Although it appeared that Israel had been reduced to a mere stump, Isaiah reminded them of God's solemn promise that David's throne would last forever, and that a shoot would grow from the root of Jesse. This shoot is our Lord Jesus Christ, the mighty king, who was born in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. In accordance with His promises, our Savior has uprooted the powers of hell and established his own vivacious kingdom of grace and forgiveness in its place. We are members of His kingdom, living branches from the Tree of Life. Thank God for Jesus' life! Thank God that He has come to share it with us!



Reflections From Home, by Jennifer

December has ushered in lots of lessons about how to live as a family of 9 here in Santiago. One learns quickly how much the language barrier is an obstacle to getting even "simple" things done, but fortunately the local people have been very patient and friendly with us as we learn, and we ARE learning which is so encouraging! I've found that keeping up with household tasks is a bit more time-consuming with the heat, all the open air (dust), and the little critters, which will unfailingly descend upon any cracker crumbs or spilled milk if not promptly cleaned up. So needless to say, it's been challenging and yet fulfilling to learn how to manage the home in these new circumstances, and *most* days I feel we come out ahead... Of course, there was the low point a couple weeks ago when we took a swollen and sore Lena into the ER for an arm X-ray after she fell out of bed the previous morning, but even there we had opportunity to thank God it wasn't broken and we also got a nice tour of how the medical system and pharmacies works here in Santiago. (She's better now, praise God!) We've also gotten the hang of our homeschool daily rhythm, and the older two boys are already seeing an orthodontist for dental braces. We have been able to worship at all three of the mission churches here in Santiago and it is truly a joy to join with other Dominican Lutherans and missionaries who are growing in the Word and knowledge of their Savior, the Advent King, Jesus.

Contact/ mailing address

Preus Family

Apartado 1356

Santiago, Dominican Republic 314-445-2350



Bendiciones!

Blessings, dear friends, as you gather with loved ones to commemorate the birth of our Lord! What a happy time of year for Christians all over the world. It gives me great satisfaction to know that you are supporting me to do what I love most: to preach the gospel! I, too, am blessed to know that my supporters share my joy. From our family to yours, we wish you safe travels and happy celebration this holiday season.

In Christ's eternal love,
Pastor David Preus

To support our work financially you may send a tax deductible gift to:
The Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod
P.O. Box 66861
St. Louis, MO 63166-6861
Make checks payable to the LCMS. Please include "Preus-Dominican" in the memo line.
Gifts can also be given securely on line at the LCMS website at:
www.lcms.org/preus

Preparing for Christmas Press Release- 11/16/2016

By LCMS Missionary Tyler McMiller

May God bless us as we prepare for the Christmas season, the birth of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World. Here in the Dominican Republic, like in any church, December has been eventful. In late November, I was placed in charge of running a youth music camp with our Church musicians across the Dominican Republic. It was a fun couple of days of Bible study, games, fellowship and music to get our congregations prepared musically to celebrate Christ's birth. In Santo Domingo we have two main evangelistic locations. The first is a healthy congregation on the outskirts of the city called Amigos de Cristo (Friend's of Christ). The second is a new mission site in the center of Santo Domingo called Pan de Vida (Bread of Life). This past weekend, taking advantage of the end of the school year, we hosted a Christmas party for the neighborhood. Crafts, music, a movie on Christ's birth and a short reflection. Thank the Lord it was a huge success! Over twenty new contacts were formed, phone numbers and addresses were written down, and many people requested that we visit them in their homes. Praise the Lord!

A few weeks previously, I began a Tuesday Bible study at the new mission location. With all the new contacts we established through this Christmas party, please pray that the contacts continue and that we continue to have open doors for the sharing of the Gospel. Thank you all for all your prayers and support that help make this work possible. Without your financial support to my mission work, I simply would not be able to be here. Please also keep my Greek studies in your prayers as I prepare for seminary and also Yanela's VISA application process. Thank you all. God bless and Merry Christmas to all!

Tyler McMiller is an LCMS missionary currently serving in the Dominican Republic. A son of Pastor Daniel McMiller, Tyler learned Spanish as a child living 7 years in Chile and Panama. During his time at Concordia Wisconsin, Tyler studied History and Spanish and worked in Hispanic ministry in Wisconsin for four years. To learn more and information on how to support, follow the link www.lcms.org/mcmiller

A well-balanced church

The owner of a new puppy got a good laugh when the little dog, out for a walk, had an itch. The trouble was that the itchy spot was accessible only to a hind leg. So, while still walking, the pup tried to scratch and tumbled over, rolling a couple of times before coming to rest.

In several places throughout Scripture, the apostle Paul writes about the church as the body of Christ, and of the importance of each member. Just as the dog needed each leg to stay balanced while walking, so the church needs all the different God-given gifts of its members: preachers and teachers, friendly visitors, generous givers, musicians and singers, wise parents and imaginative children, people to produce and distribute meals, newsletters, lesson materials, and on and on.

When we start thinking that some part of Christ's body isn't necessary, we risk taking quite a tumble!

The legend of the sand dollar

There's a pretty little legend that I would like to tell
Of the birth and death of Jesus found in this lowly shell.

If you examine closely, you'll see that you find here
Four nail holes and a fifth hole, made by a Roman's spear.

On one side the Easter lily, its center is the star
That appeared unto the shepherds and led them from afar.

The Christmas poinsettia etched on the other side
Reminds us of his birthday, our happy Christmastide.

Now break the center open, and here you will release
The five white doves awaiting to spread good will and peace.

This simple little symbol, Christ left for you and me
To help us spread his Gospel, through all eternity.

—Author unknown

Where's your Ebenezer?

The words of the well-known hymn “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” were written in 1757 by pastor and hymnist Robert Robinson. While most of the lines resonate with singers and listeners, the reference to “Ebenezer” may prove confusing:

Here I raise my Ebenezer;
Here by thy great help I've come.

In 1 Samuel 7:12, Ebenezer, Hebrew for “stone of help,” is what Samuel names a stone memorial he erects to God after Israel wins a battle against the Philistines. (Similarly, the name Eliezer appears several times in scripture, meaning “My God, [my] help.”)

If you were to “raise [your] Ebenezer” in memory of a place where God helped you, where might it stand? Maybe it's at the scene of a car accident you survived, or on a college campus where your faith was challenged or molded. Maybe it's a peaceful spot in nature where you sensed the Spirit's presence. Or maybe it's simply in your heart, where a figurative Ebenezer monument can remind you of the Lord's constant care and love.

Free refills

God's kingdom is like free refills at a restaurant. Wait — *what?!*

Jesus used common, everyday items to explain the kingdom of God; we can too! The kingdom is like free refills. Still thirsty after one soda or coffee? Get another — no charge. In fact, the kingdom of God is better than free refills because you don't even have to pay for the first glass.

It's like having a parent buy you a favorite meal when you're young. You sit back and savor it without the price crossing your mind. That's okay, because the generous giver loves you and wants to be with you.

Sure, that's simplistic, but so are Jesus' parables. Overanalyze them and they may fall apart. But ponder the single point each makes, maybe get a chuckle and an *a-ha!* out of it, and that parable has done its job. So grab another free refill — of your beverage and of God's love!

—Heidi Mann

Ignite!

It is with Christians as with burning coals. If these are scattered apart, one after the other, they are easily extinguished. But, when collected together, the fire of one preserves that of the other, and the glowing coals often ignite others that lie near.

—August Francke

Bible Quiz



In Matthew 13, to what does Jesus compare the kingdom of heaven?

- A. A farmer sowing seed
- B. A mustard seed
- C. Yeast
- D. Hidden treasure
- E. A merchant who finds a pearl
- F. A fishing net
- G. All of the above

Answer: G (See Matthew 13:24-51.)



“The Wise May Bring Their Learning”

The wise may bring their learning, the rich may bring their wealth,
 And some may bring their greatness, and some bring strength and health;
 We, too, would bring our treasures to offer to the King;
 We have no wealth or learning; what shall we children bring?
 We'll bring him hearts that love him; we'll bring him thankful praise,
 And young souls meekly striving to walk in holy ways;
 And these shall be the treasures we offer to the King,
 And these are gifts that even the poorest child may bring.
 We'll bring the little duties we have to do each day;
 We'll try our best to please him, at home, at school, at play;
 And better are these treasures to offer to our King;
 Than richest gifts without them — yet these a child may bring.

—Anonymous

Puzzle!

Write a word that fits each definition. Then place the letters in the numbered boxes to read a Beatitude, one of the special statements Jesus shares in Matthew 5.

Puzzle!

Write a word that fits each definition. Then place the letters in the numbered boxes to read a Beatitude, one of the special statements Jesus shares in Matthew 5.

The color of coal	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-bottom: 5px;"> 1281721 </div>
Flower with thorns	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-bottom: 5px;"> 9—43 </div>
Woman's Sunday garment	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-bottom: 5px;"> 7236524 </div>
Vegetable in a pod	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-bottom: 5px;"> 141016 </div>
A light for my _____	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-bottom: 5px;"> —201112 </div>
Electric fish	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-bottom: 5px;"> 1315— </div>
Dark green gem	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-bottom: 5px;"> 181922———— </div>

1234567

8910

111213

1415161718192021222324

Answers: black, rose, dress, pea, path, eel, emerald; blessed are the poor, meek, etc.

MASON JAR nightLight

Because Jesus is the light of the world, his followers don't need to fear darkness or life's dark times. Make this nightlight to remind you of Jesus' light and presence.



What you need:

- Work area with good ventilation
- Mason jar
- Clear glue that works on glass
- Paintbrush
- Glass stones
- Tealight candle
- Lighter
- Adult supervision

What you do:

1. Starting at the top of the jar, brush glue on a small section.
2. Press glass stones onto the glue in rows. Let dry.
3. Continue gluing stones, in small sections, until the entire jar is covered.
4. When dry, place a candle inside. Light with adult help.



Light OF THE World

In a world full of sin and darkness, how can we find our way?
Discover Jesus' answer in John 8:12, NIV.

*Directions: Use the key to fill in the missing vowels.
Then read the completed Bible verse.*

KEY:

A

E

I

O

" _ _ M T H _ L _ G H T _ F

T H _ W _ R L D. W H _ _ V _ R

F _ L L _ W S M _ W _ L L N _ V _ R

W _ L K _ N D _ R K N _ S S."

J _ H N 8:12, NIV