

FLC & OSL Light

Newsletter of First Lutheran and Our Savior's Ministries

Volume 4, Number 4 November 2020

"We Need a Little Christmas"

*For we need a little Christmas
Right this very minute
Candles in the window
Carols at the spinet*

This year, I find myself in need of a little normalcy. When I think back to previous Thanksgivings and Christmas, I can remember driving to Milwaukee to spend it with my family. Of course, that all depended on Steve and my work's schedules. But on average, we made it back for at least one of the holidays.

In emails and messages from family and friends, I see the same sentiment. I have heard things such as I miss you and your thanksgiving salad. No one can make pumpkin pie like you do. Others are lamenting on scaled-back celebrations due to COVID19.

In January 2020, I had big plans for this year. During Lent, we had mini-Easters on Sunday. Holy Week was going to look different. My original vision for Advent 2020 looks very different from what we are going to do in worship. Now, those ideas will have to wait until next year.

Still, I am excited about Advent and Christmas this year. While there will be no potluck meals or pie socials, we will be celebrating the coming of Christ two times, first as a baby and then at his second appearing.

Once again, this Advent, we will lean into the gift of silence as it can enrich the life of a worshipping community. In music, the rests are as important as the notes, and they must be counted and honored in the same way that sounds are made. Similarly, silence deepens the experience of the words, music, and actions of worship.

At first, it may feel uncomfortable. Then recall that God comes to us in silence and stillness. "Be still and know" (Psalm 46:10).

Our daily Advent devotionals will be a little different. Karen Dwyer, Michael Murray, and Steve Seilhymer (our LPAs) are assisting me in the Tuesday Devotions and Midweek Worship. Sadly, we will not be using Holden Evening Prayer this year, but our services will be equally meaningful.

Then before you know it, the Christmas Season will be here. Our gatherings will be similar but different from the past.

*For we need a little music
Need a little laughter
Need a little singing, ringing through the rafter
And we need a little snappy
Happy ever after
Need a little Christmas now*

I look forward to celebrating this Advent and Christmas with you all!

Pastor Carol

We Have a Mission

Our Savior's Lutheran Church is a nurturing, accepting, and joyful faith community which invites all to grow in Christ.

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. 2 Peter 3:18

Rev. Carol Seilhymer
Parsonage: 406-826-4080
Cell: 612-532-9805
pr.carols@gmail.com

First Lutheran Church
Office: 406-826-3516
<http://fleplains.org/>

Our Savior's Lutheran Church
Office: 406-827-3926
<http://www.oursaviorslutherantf.org/>

(Continued from p.1)

THE HOPE OF THE MESSIAH

In Advent, we gather for Sunday and Midweek Advent worship in *The Hope of the Messiah*. The altar cloth and paraments are blue as a color of hope.

The Sunday Sermon series is “Hopes and Prophecy” during Sunday Services at 11 am. The readings speak to hope from Daniel in the lion’s den, to Joel and Isaiah’s prophesy of hope, and the visitors to Mary and Elizabeth.

“Preparing in Christ’s Presence” is the midweek service theme, at 7 pm on Thursdays. The worship is quieter. Candles will be lit. Prayers will be lifted up. Karen Dwyer, Michael Murray, and Steve Seilhymer will be leading a meditative devotional.

Christmas Eve is the *Hope of the Messiah* Candlelight Service with Holy Communion at 5 pm. If you are bringing a guest, please advise Karen Dwyer or Pr. Carol so that we may ensure safe, physical distance in worship.

The First Sunday of Christmas will be a Lessons and Carols Service with Holy Communion at 11 am



O Lord, How Shall I Meet You?

This year for the daily devotions, we are using the 2020 Advent Devotional, “O Lord How Shall I Meet You?” from Luther Seminary. This year’s contributing authors are James L. Boyce ’71 M.Div. (Professor Emeritus of New Testament and Greek), Mary Jane Haemig (Professor Emerita of Church History), and Arland J. Hultgren (Asher O. and Carrie Nasby Professor Emeritus of New Testament).

We have received permission to post the devotions on Facebook. You will continue to receive the devotion either on Facebook, a daily email, or a hard copy on Sunday.

SUNDAY SCHOOL PAGEANT

Join us in worship on December 20 when the Sunday School presents *A Star –Christmas* Pageant. Come and hear our youngest members tell us the Christmas Story in a new way.

LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE

As the longest night, the winter solstice, approaches, we gather to mark the shortest day of the year, on December 20, 3 pm at FLC. Tradition says that nature and all her creatures stop and hold their breath to see if the sun will turn back from its wanderings, if the days will lengthen, and the earth will once again feel the sun’s warmth. We come with our honest yearnings seeking the return of light and hope.

ADOPT A FAMILY FOR CHRISTMAS

Yes, Virginia, we are adopting a family for Christmas through SCCFF. The lists are out. Remember, we are not required to purchase every item on the list.

The unwrapped gifts need to be returned to the church by December 6.

THIRSTY THEOLOGY

Thirsty Theology meets the first Monday at 6 pm at FLC. The topic on December 7 is *Advent – A Season for All Generations*. In keeping with a festive mood, participants may bring their own dessert and/or a bag dinner. Coffee and tea will be served this evening.

On January 4, the group will begin to discuss the *Top 5 Lutheran Trump Cards* written by Dave Daubert, an ELCA pastor. The book is \$9.99. The church will place an order on 12/7/2020. If 10 or more books are ordered, the shipping is free. There is a kindle version available through Amazon. Please contact Pr. Carol to order the book.

Advent Offerings

When you think of offerings, what comes to mind? Typically, people think of money. But offerings come in many shapes and sizes. It can be poetry or music or dance or...

On Sundays in Advent, the pianists and a few others will be sharing a musical offering with the congregation. If you would like to participate in this, please let Pr. Carol know.

The midweek offerings for this year are going to the Sanders County Sherriff’s Relief Fund.

(Continued from p.2)

All Creation Sings

“All Creation Sings” is the newest hymnal supplement for the ELW. The worship team and Pr. Carol are excited about this new music and liturgy. The Spanish setting is expanded to include verses for the Kyrie and Gloria. The new music is singable with a contemporary feeling. The supplement has an emphasis on the whole of creation. Four major themes are: care for creation, lament in times of crisis, healing and wholeness, and justice and peace.



School Clothing Cash Drive Challenge

OSL and FCL have had a friendly challenge between the churches in the fall. The 2018 drive was for the local food banks, and FLC came out on top. The 2019 challenge was toilet paper for the local food banks and SCCFF, and FLC came out on top again.

This year, the friendly challenge was a School Clothes Cash Drive. The final results are here!!!

FLC collected \$805.00

OSL collected \$723.68

Congratulation to FLC for coming out on top again. Thank you to everyone who participated. The real winners are the children in the communities.

Freedom of a Christian Study in 2021.

In 1520, Martin Luther wrote a treatise titled *The Freedom of a Christian*. Pr. Carol will be leading the study starting on Wednesday, January 6, for ten sessions. Sessions will be weekly from 10-11:30 am at FLC. Books containing the treatise can be ordered through Amazon or Barnes & Noble. Pr. Carol recommends the annotated books of Timothy J. Wengert (editor) or Mark D. Tranvik (editor). If you would prefer the link to a free online version, contact Pr. Carol.

Technology Grant

In September 2020, the church councils and Pr. Carol became aware of a grant opportunity through the Montana Synod for technology.

When it was necessary to provide online worship services, Pr. Carol discovered a new ministry and outreach opportunity. Former members and new people in the community have found the churches through the various worship and devotional options online.

Initially, Pr. Carol and her husband, Steve, were recording and uploading the videos to YouTube, which has significant limitations. All of this was done on their personal equipment and cloud-based storage. With the council's permission, they consulted with Synod Staff regarding the possibility of receiving a COVID technology grant from the ELCA.

After a brief discussion with the Synod staff, It was agreed that the Synod could help out with some of the costs, to the tune of \$600. Pastor Carol filled out an application and received the \$600 grant within two weeks with the understanding that if the churches decide not to move forward and support the recommended upgrades, the monies would be returned to the Synod.

Each congregation has received a Thrivent Card for \$250 to be applied towards the project. Each council agreed to supplement an additional \$500 per church. The equipment has been ordered and will be utilized soon.

In the meantime, other areas of use for the equipment has been discovered. It can be used to record special worship services such as confirmations, baptisms, and Christmas pageants. It will be of use in Bible studies for videos and offering other presentations. A small group can attend Synod meetings or courses via zoom.

Parsonage changes for OSL

With sad hearts, the council was advised that the parsonage tenants, Rob and Andrea Christensen, will be moving into their own home on January 1, 2021. At the December council meeting, they will begin to explore the next steps for the parsonage.

(Continued from p.3)

COVID Update

Since March 2020, the leadership at First Lutheran Church in Plains and Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Thompson Falls has continually discerned what to do in the faith communities.

When the state of Montana entered into Phase One of the shutdown, the churches suspended all in-person activities, including worship. As you were informed back then, "this decision was not made out of fear, but out of great love for each of you and for our neighbors. We hope that choosing to practice social distancing for a time will limit the spread of this infectious disease and protect the most vulnerable in our community."

The worship team, worship assistants, musicians, and Pr. Carol shifted to streaming the worship services on Sunday. Since that time, the process for recording has been streamlined. Now, we offer a virtual Tuesday Devotion and Thursday Prayer besides live and virtual worship services.

Recently, there has been an uptick in COVID19 cases around the world. We even notice it in Sanders County. At the joint church council meetings in October 2020, the group discussed and developed a plan for the possibility of needing to close. At that time, no changes were made on how we are addressing the situation in Phase 2. While we are aware some churches choose to ignore these things, for the love of the neighbor we will continue to follow them by:

- Wearing masks in worship
- Assigning seating
- Maintaining 6-foot physical between unrelated people.
- Using hand sanitizer or washing or hands
- Cancelling fellowship events
- Refraining from physical contact, including handshakes, fist bumps, hugs, etc.
- Asking you to stay home if you are sick or have been potentially exposed
- When there are less than four active cases in Sanders County, small groups may elect not to wear masks when seated with a 6-foot physical distance. When moving about, individuals will mask up.

In addition, the joint council established guidelines for a plan of action in the event of an outbreak in

the congregation or if Pr. Carol is exposed and/or contracts COVID19.

The Guidelines are as follows:

- The churches will shut down if the state re-enters Phase 1. The building will be cleaned during this time. Worship will be virtual.
- We will shut down for two weeks if the Pastor is exposed or ill or if an active case is diagnosed in a person who attended a recent service. Again, the church will be cleaned. Worship will be virtual
- If a case develops secondary to a small group meeting, the group quarantines for two weeks, and the church is cleaned.
- We will ask the LPA's to help lead worship if the Pastor is in quarantine or sick.

In the coming weeks and months, we may flow in and out of having the church open or closed. If this happens, emails will be sent and there will be posts on Facebook. Telephone calls will be made to anyone without email. The church voicemails will be updated.

Eventually, the state will move into phase 3 which means all restrictions will be lifted. When this happens, we will slowly return to the old normal, removing restrictions over several weeks.

Until Phase 3 comes, we know that Jesus is still present with us whenever we gather as the body of Christ even when it looks a little different. May the words from Matthew 25:40 continue to guide us. *"Remember that the neighbor always comes first and that what we do to the least of these who are members of our family [in Christ], we do to Christ."*



An Advent Quote

The celebration of Advent is possible only to those who are troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect, and who look forward to something greater to come. – Dietrich Bonhoeffer