

Engaged in Mission

magazine



ONE THING NEEDFUL

| RETURN TO JESUS TO BETTER SERVE EACH OTHER & THE COMMUNITY |

SPRING 2021



Stories about cultivating leaders intentionally engaged in loving the Lord, people, and our Lutheran theology to make disciples of all nations in the Minnesota South District and beyond.

STAFF IN THIS ISSUE

Rev. Dr. Lucas Woodford
District President

Rev. Stefan Wismar
Executive Assistant to the President

Debra Connolly
Administrative Assistant for President Woodford & Rev. Wismar

Sarabeth Marcello
Communications Director

Rev. Dr. William Utech
Assistant to the President for Missions

Dr. Phillip Johnson
Assistant to the President for Mission Formation

Sean Martens
Assistant to the President for Schools & Commissioned Ministers

Debbie Borchardt
Commissioned Worker Support

Rick Marko
Treasurer

Julie Bigler
Accounting

Kai Larson
LCEF District Vice President

Rev. Fred Hinz
Public Policy Advocate

CONTACT US

communications@mnsdistrict.org

facebook.com/mnsdistrict

COVER IMAGE

Pastors Joshua Miller, Steven Bielenberg, and Vue Lee during a community coat drive in St. Paul.

Photo by May Lee.

1 The needful

We must turn back to the one thing needful—Jesus Christ—to truly minister to our church body and community.

2 The Bible in 365 days

How one congregation in Southern Minnesota is continuing to put the Word of God first.

4 Mercy in the Midway

Two St. Paul Metro congregations' cooperative partnership brings tangible help to their neighbors.

6 Your mission gifts at work

An updated list for 2021 of District-supported missions and missionaries.

7 Missionaries in their own words

Updates from District-supported POBLO missionaries.

9 Bearing fruit in old age

The role of older adults in the body of Christ—and ideas for connecting them with opportunities to serve their congregation and community.

10 Not another plea for money!

Stewardship tips to help increase congregational giving, while training members to be good financial stewards.

12 Devotional moment: Let us hold fast

The book of Hebrews reminds us of the importance of meeting together as the body of Christ.

13 Coming soon: Engaged in Mission video series

This spring, the District will release a series of videos that will help you learn more about the multi-ethnic leaders in our District.

© 2021 Minnesota South District, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Reproduction of a single story or article for congregational use is permitted. Such reproductions should credit Minnesota South District as the source. Photos credited to sources outside Minnesota South District are not to be copied.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Minnesota South District, LCMS | 14301 Grand Avenue, Burnsville, MN 55306 | 952-435-2550 | mnsdistrict.org



The Needful

by Lucas Woodford

I am often struck by how the fullness of Scripture helps us keep balance in our faith life. We are to fear, love, and trust in God above all things, while at the same time loving our neighbor as ourselves in our words and deeds.

For example, James reminds believers that a life of faith without works for the benefit of our neighbor is, in his words, “dead.”

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

James 2:14-17

Faith is more than internal conviction. It is a living conviction that compels us to action—to love others—in word and deed, just as our Lord Jesus Christ loves us and gave His life for us. In a world full of empty talk, action is indispensable to authentic lives of faith.

Yet our conviction and faith in our Lord must first remain the foundation of all action. In the familiar account of Mary and Martha, Jesus tells us what is first essential and needful for all believers.

But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

Luke 10:40-42

Jesus notes Martha’s anxiety, but He does not approve it. In fact, rather than affirming her frustration at Mary, Jesus tells Martha she’s the one who has her priorities out of order.

Every one of us “Martha’s” are unsettled by this story. It seems so unfair! It always does when we’re only looking at ourselves and what we feel entitled to. This is the preeminent problem of our times. Our individualism has us so preoccupied with our personal fulfillment that anything that gets in our way must be removed. Even if that “thing” is Jesus.

Martha is preoccupied with all the things that need to be done for the meal. But Jesus says she’s missing the “necessary” thing: When the kingdom of God is near, choose the portion that is good above all others. Martha is so preoccupied about doing things for Jesus that she is blind to what Jesus does for her. Her avid individualism is keeping her from the greatest good—the gifts of Jesus.


These two biblical accounts show us that the life of discipleship is always a balancing act between faith and works. Discipleship means trusting in the sufficiency of Jesus for our daily and eternal needs while living out that trust in a life of service and good works toward our neighbor.

The same goes for the work of all congregations and ministries in the Minnesota South District. We endeavor to make sure the needful thing of every disciple—sitting at the feet of Jesus and receiving the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of faith—is balanced with meeting the needs of those in our congregations and communities.

The stories in this issue of *Engaged in Mission* celebrate the wonderful work of Minnesota South District congregations and ministries and how they are engaged in the one thing needful to meet the needs of those in our very midst.



Rev. Dr. Lucas Woodford is president of the MN South District. View his latest blog posts and what he’s reading at mnsdistrict.org/presidents-office. Email him at lucas.woodford@mnsdistrict.org.

A man with a beard is seen from the side, sitting at a wooden desk and reading an open Bible. On the desk, there is a grey mug and a smartphone. On the wall behind him is a calendar with the days of the week (S M T W T F S) at the top. The scene is softly lit, suggesting a quiet morning or evening.

THE BIBLE IN *365 Days*

by Phillip Beukema

The past year has brought many changes to Immanuel Lutheran Church, Lakefield. Like most churches across the country, we closed our doors in March of 2020. Since then, we've complied with state and federal mandates to the best of our ability. More importantly, we've considered the second table of the Law by showing love for our neighbors. Our members have been gracious in accepting changes and cancellations.

With one exception.

From the beginning of the shutdown, members called out for Bible study. They understood our knowledge of God and His will toward us are derived from nowhere but God's own Word.

Our elders discussed restarting Bible study. However, as COVID-19 infections increased in our small community, we didn't want to risk the health of our members and community. With God's help, we got the idea for a livestream 365-day Bible reading. We use Facebook Live as that's how most members view Sunday services.

Our readings are from the ESV and a relatively new publication from Concordia Publishing House, *Portals of Prayer Devotional Bible*. After our nightly readings, I share a brief devotion about the text, and then we close with Luther's Evening Prayer. The devotion gives followers a clearer understanding of the text and provides time for prayer and meditation on God's Word as we go to bed in good cheer.

Our journey through God's Word began on September 8, 2020. At the time, we didn't know how many people would join us or what the community response would be. Praise God! We have a faithful following from our congregation. And by the grace of God, we have non-members from our community and even fellow brothers and sisters in Christ joining us from Wisconsin, Illinois, and other states. The feedback has been inspiring, thanking us for sharing God's Word.

The desire to hear God's Word is incredible, and we give Him all the glory. Isaiah reminds us of the power of God's Word,

"So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it"
Isaiah 55:11



Rev. Phillip Beukema begins the Bible reading on Facebook Live on February 6.

Our prayer at Immanuel is to bring the Word of God to those unable to join us Sunday mornings. We see this as a mission opportunity the Lord has provided to reach the lost, strengthen the faithful, bring healing to the suffering, and care for all souls. This will come through God alone and the power of His Word.

The prophet Isaiah directed Israel to God's Word and away from the things of the world: "Should not a people inquire of their God?" (Isaiah 8:19). To all who are hurting today, all in our church body concerned about the future, we need not look any further than those calling out to receive God's Word.

To all who are hurting today, all in our church body concerned about the future, we need not look any further than those calling out to receive God's Word.

Today, truth is often elusive, but we have an opportunity through technology to continue sharing God's Word during these times of social distancing and reduced church attendance. At Immanuel, our goal is to follow our Lord's example and ensure His Word goes forth in truth and purity. The Lord Himself exhorts us in this manner: "If you abide in My word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth" (John 8:31-32).



Rev. Phillip Beukema has served as pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Lakefield since November 2019.



Mercy in the Midway

SERVING OUR NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

by Joshua Miller & Vue Lee

As Christians, we are called by our Lord Jesus to serve our neighbors. Service through mercy goes together with witness to the Gospel and life together in faith. Since New Testament times, Christian communities have engaged together in service through works of mercy. The Church's ministry of mercy flows from the Gospel it preaches and the faith it confesses.

In the second chapter of Acts, Peter's witness to the Good News of Jesus led early believers in Jesus to share all that they had in common with each other. This sharing of resources with others was not coerced by the apostles in any way but came as the natural overflow of a heart changed by preaching of the Gospel and filled with a common life of faith (Acts 2:45). A little later on, the Apostle Paul made the work of mercy an integral feature of his ministry, as is demonstrated by his advocacy and collecting of offerings for Christians in Jerusalem, who had lost resources in an earthquake.

In encouraging other Christians to support those in Jerusalem in need, Paul taught that the generosity of serving others in mercy is an act of love that flows from God's grace given to us in Jesus Christ and is nurtured in the Church's life of faith together even across congregational boundaries (2 Corinthians 8:4-9).

This love for others, created by God's grace, developed by the Church's life of faith, and shared across congregations, is still active among Christians serving others in mercy today. On Friday, January 22, that mercy took concrete form in the parking lot of Jehovah Lutheran Church. On a day when the thermometer read 0 degrees Fahrenheit, members of our two parishes, Jehovah and King of Kings, came together to distribute coats to neighbors in need from the Midway area of St. Paul.

The two of us, Pastor Miller and Pastor Lee, got to know each other well during Pastor Miller's vicarage at King of Kings, a congregation with a

big heart. At the end of the vicarage, Pastor Miller was called to serve Jehovah Lutheran, a congregation with a history of nearly 100 years of serving its neighbors in the Midway neighborhood of St. Paul. Having done ministry together during the vicarage, we were both excited that we could continue to work together with sisters and brothers in Christ on the same circuit of churches.

Knowing the generosity of our two congregations, we had been thinking about what we could do together as the people of God to serve our neighbors in the Midway. Many factors moved us to work together, so when a coat drive was suggested, it made a lot of sense. Coats are desperately needed by many in our community. At Jehovah, we have had a number of people ask if we have spare coats. Some of these people have been homeless, some have not. Either way, the need is real. It gets cold in Minnesota, and coats can be expensive.

The weather was cold, but the Christian fellowship we share as sisters and brothers in Christ was warm.

We brought the idea to lay leaders in both congregations. The response was overwhelming. People from Jehovah and King of Kings came together to plan and accomplish collections of coats for three weeks, transportation of coats collected at King of Kings to the distribution site at Jehovah, advertising for the event, and successful distribution of the coats and other items to those in need.

The reality of COVID-19 poses difficulties to some traditional methods of outreach, but at Jehovah, the members have become creative in how they serve others. Two prior food distributions have demonstrated that the congregation can distribute needed resources in a drive-through manner. Neighbors can drive through the parking lot to pick up the gifts distributed by the church in a near-contactless way. With this in mind, volunteers from Jehovah and King of Kings set up clothing racks in the Jehovah parking lot, with coats sorted by age, gender, and size.

As the project took shape and our members began to distribute the coats, the members of



our respective parishes got to know each other, befriend each other, and work together. Our members worked side by side. The weather outside was cold, but the Christian fellowship we share as sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ was warm. All together, we gave away about 250 coats of all different size as well as gloves, hats, and snow pants.

As we continue to be Christ's Church in this time on the St. Paul Circuit, we look forward to other ways we can act together. We look forward to how our two congregations can cooperate in witnessing to the Gospel, living our faith, and serving others in mercy. In doing so, we continue to live as the Church has from its earliest days, engaging in mercy moved by the Gospel and formed by our common life of faith.



Rev. Vue Lee has served as associate pastor at King of Kings Lutheran Church in Roseville since December 2016.



Rev. Dr. Joshua Miller has served as pastor at Jehovah Lutheran Church in St. Paul since September 2020.



YOUR MISSION GIFTS AT WORK

We invite you to use this list in your personal and corporate prayers, that these leaders would be strengthened in their efforts to reach people with the good news of Jesus.

2021 District-supported missions & missionaries

MN South / CALMS Exploratory Trips to Central America

Rev. Dr. William Utech

District Correctional Ministry

DCE Dr. James Seemann

Holy Cross & Our Savior Lutheran Churches (Austin & Brownsdale) & East Austin Immigrant Outreach

Pastor Gemechu Olana

LINC Twin Cities

Pastor Ben Griffin & Pastor Demelash Yoseph

New Creation Lutheran Church (Shakopee)

Vicar Jorge Gomez

New Church Incubator: Multi-Ethnic Church Plant (Minneapolis)

Pastor Paul Biebighauser & Vicar Matthew Cephus

- **POBLO (People of the Book Lutheran Outreach)**
- *Nader & Georgette Alaraj, Twin Cities*
- *John & Mariam Gayed, Rochester*
- **ReDO / Shepherd of the Valley (Hastings)**
- *Pastor Chad Kirchoff*
- **St. Matthew's & Gloria Dei Lutheran Churches (Columbia Heights & Minneapolis) & NE Minneapolis Outreach**
- *Vicar Martin Cornes*
- **Sudanese Evangelical Lutheran Mission of Southern Minnesota (Faribault)**
- *Pastor Gatluk Reat*
- **UpWorks Christian Community Development (Minneapolis)**
- *Lisa Peterson*

MN South District LCMS career and GEO missionaries



Rev. Dr. Thomas & Mary Aadland

Theological educator, Kenya



Rev. Vance & Linda Becker

Theological educators, Kenya



Johanna Heidorn

Photographer / communication outreach specialist, Latin America & Caribbean



Rev. Dr. Daniel & Dr. Joan Jastram

Asia theological education manager, Asia



“We were able to meet recently with more volunteers that we could not visit prior to the end of 2020. We enjoyed delivering thanks to Pastor Joel Vano [pictured above, right] and Sue from Lutheran Church of the Ascension, who volunteer at the Burnsville International Friendship Center. Along with other volunteers, they have been always working to teach ESL students. With the pandemic, some of the IFC classes were suspended and some went to Zoom. We wanted to thank them for their efforts and show them we are looking forward to 2021 with hopes to connect with more students in the Burnsville area.

We pray with those who are hungry to hear the Word of God, who need encouragement, or who need fellowship.

The Burnsville IFC has proven vital for ongoing discussions and Bible study meetings we have been conducting with Muslims. We appreciate that the space and convenience is available to gather—in Jesus’ name—and pray with those who are hungry to hear the Word of God, who need encouragement, or who need fellowship.

Additionally, we have been meeting over a meal with some immigrants at an apartment complex meeting room and often share the Gospels and aim to see some needs to be covered either by church assistance or personal attention.”

Nader & Georgette Alaraj, POBLO, Twin Cities

“For three days, Mariam was thinking of Wafaa, a woman from the Middle East who came to the US a while ago for medical reasons. Mariam believed the Holy Spirit was reminding her to pray for Wafaa and to call her to offer help and counseling. When Mariam called, Wafaa started crying. So Mariam asked if they could meet.

When they met together, Mariam learned how Wafaa’s many responsibilities couldn’t distract her from despair, disappointment, and insecurities toward her husband. She feared her husband would leave anytime and marry another woman without divorcing her. Yet she was not particularly frustrated at her husband; instead, she was frustrated at the God of Islam, as he gives permission to men to commit adultery in this way. How can he destroy families, harm kids, and cause instability in Islamic homes? Wafaa concluded that she doesn’t respect Islam and its beliefs, but she cannot announce that to anyone, even herself.

Then, for two hours, Mariam explained Christianity to Wafaa. With open eyes, they prayed at the coffee shop. Mariam asked Wafaa to pray for her husband and release forgiveness to him. They also prayed that God may open his heart to see the truth and the truth will set him free. It wasn’t an easy discussion, but God gave Mariam wisdom to speak the truth in love.

John & Mariam Gayed, POBLO, Rochester

It wasn’t an easy discussion, but God gave Mariam wisdom to speak the truth in love.

YOUR CHURCH HAS A FUTURE

It has potential for growth and an opportunity to reach deep into your community with the Gospel. What better feeling to know that your ministry is playing a part in God's redemptive work—a dream you've always nurtured.

But there's just one problem—your church is in desperate need of repair or upgrade.

Now may be the time to explore a Church Improvement Loan through Lutheran Church Extension Fund.

Church improvement loans are limited to LCMS congregations and include:

- Maximum 10-year term
- Up to \$150,000
- 24 months at Cost of Funds (COF) adjusted annually
- LCEF COF plus up to 2.5% adjusted annually for remaining term
- Payments fully amortized over term

The Church Improvement Loan is designed to help churches fund critical church repairs and upgrades.



Lutheran Church Extension Fund

> where investments build ministry

Visit lcef.org or call 800-843-5233.



For personalized service, contact your Minnesota South District Vice President Kai Larson at **952-223-2163** or **Kai.Larson@lcef.org**.

LCEF is a nonprofit religious organization; therefore, LCEF investments are not FDIC-insured bank deposit accounts. This is not an offer to sell investments, nor a solicitation to buy. LCEF will offer and sell its securities only in states where authorized. The offer is made solely by LCEF's Offering Circular. Investors should carefully read the Offering Circular, which more fully describes associated risks. Lutheran Church Extension Fund-Missouri Synod (NMLS# 3444). Illinois Residential Mortgage Licensee (MB.0006057). Loans made or arranged pursuant to a California Law License (6037619). For more information on LCEF's lending license go to lcef.org/state-disclosures/. The National Office is located at: 10733 Sunset Office Drive, Suite 300, St. Louis, MO 63127-1020.

Bearing fruit in old age

IDEAS FOR OLDER ADULT MINISTRY & OUTREACH

by Delores McGillivray

“Thank you so much for calling. It was good to hear your voice.” That was the response at the end of a phone call from one senior member to a shut-in. A simple act, but a compassionate one. Letting someone know they are not alone is good medicine for the receiver and the sender.

Think about Mordecai’s response to Esther: “And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14b). Who knows? Those of us who have lived awhile on this earth may be here “for such a time as this.” From the miracle of birth through the gift of longevity, we have loved and lost, had mountaintop highs and deep disappointments, experienced good days and bad, more ups and downs than we can count, and through it all there have been lessons to be learned, bringing resilience, hope, and spiritual growth.

Wherever we are, we have means and opportunity to be joyful encouragers and uplifters to others.

God is not done with us yet (Jeremiah 29:11).

Everyone’s situation is unique—we must be intentional in our concern for others. “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Galatians 5:14). Wherever we are, we have means and opportunity to be joyful encouragers and uplifters to others.

Here are examples from local congregations:

- Sending Valentine boxes to college students, assuring the student of support from their multigenerational home congregation.
- Keeping members, especially older adults, connected to Jesus and to each other by forming Life Groups for small group Bible study, either in-person or through Zoom.
- Forming a volunteer calling committee—to call every member of the congregation in 30 days. Success! Now, weekly calls to shut-ins

and those without computer access who don’t come to in-person services.

- Sending Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Valentine’s Day cards to those who haven’t been able to attend in-person church services. Easter cards, too. Each card has a message and signatures from the senders.

Senior members volunteer in so many ways in addition to the congregation-wide outreach above. They also deliver church newsletters, bulletins, and devotional materials. Some have delivered frozen meals, paid for meal delivery from a local restaurant, or participated in food distribution outreach. Each act of kindness sends a message—the receiver is not alone. It also serves as a blessing to the giver: “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

~~~

The Minnesota South District has supported older adult ministry through S.A.G.E.S. (Saints Alive, Growing Ever Serving) for over 30 years. S.A.G.E.S. produces a quarterly publication, SAGACITY, containing items of interest, connectivity, spiritual inspiration, and humor. It’s available online, and it can be printed and distributed to those at home.

Additionally, the annual S.A.G.E.S. event, The GATHERING, provides Christian fellowship, service, and life enrichment. Sadly, it was cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic; however, the S.A.G.E.S. board is pleased to let you know that plans to hold The GATHERING in the fall of 2021 are in the works, under the theme “20/20 VISION in 2021: Courage Today, Hope Tomorrow,” with Rev. Mark Jeske, featured presenter. You are invited!

More information about S.A.G.E.S. and older adult ministry is available online at [mnsdistrict.org/sages](https://mnsdistrict.org/sages).



Delores McGillivray is a member at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Rochester. She serves as editor for SAGACITY.



# Not another plea for money!

## 5 TIPS TO INCREASE CONGREGATIONAL GIVING

by Joel Landskroener



**Two of the greatest fears** people have are public speaking and asking for money. As someone whose job requires both, I have learned to enjoy raising funds for the ministry at Mayer Lutheran High School and sharing our story with as many people as I am able.

But what about our congregations? While it's natural for our schools, camps, and other auxiliary ministries to engage in fundraising, and even hire people to do so, the same is not true in our congregations. The person in the pew may wish fundraising was never discussed. After all, who wants to hear another stewardship sermon—besides me? Yet I believe every congregation can use Christian fundraising principles to increase annual giving.

So without further ado, here are five things each congregation can do to increase giving.

### 1. EDUCATE THE CONGREGATION

Not everyone is an accountant or finance genius. In fact, most of us dread church finance meetings. Yet it's essential to teach our people how much it costs to run each ministry. The faithful need to know what it costs to provide for the pastor and staff. They should be able to recite the annual budget's bottom line, or at least a number close to it.

A simple message should carefully be shared about these facts through the congregations' communication channels. My experience shows that, other than certain members of the church council

and the pastor, few know what the real costs are. Sharing this information thoughtfully, regularly, with tact and perhaps a bit of humor, helps people begin to look at how they can help.

### 2. TELL MINISTRY STORIES OFTEN

It's one thing to know what things cost. It's another to know what effect that money is having. Every congregation—large or small, urban or rural, new or historic—has many stories to share about how the Gospel proclaimed in that place has affected the lives of others. Those ministry stories need to be shared regularly in as many ways as possible. Connecting givers with the results of their gifts is powerful.

Remember that people don't give because you need money. They give because they believe they're making a difference for eternity in the lives of others. I have many conversations with donors who want to know what difference their gift makes. They have plenty of worthy charities to support. Why ours? My response is always a story. Stories of the work of the Gospel are dynamite. The more personal, the better.

**Every congregation has stories to share about how the Gospel proclaimed in that place affected the lives of others.**



### 3. MAINTAIN ACCURATE RECORDS

In the fundraising world, we have a measurement called LYBNT—Last Year But Not This year. I wonder how many folks fall off the church giving wagon each year unnoticed. Keeping accurate records doesn't require expensive software. Well-kept records not only share who no longer gives or who decreased their giving, they also provide an opportunity for ministry. It may be a tough conversation, but an elder, the pastor, or someone with a passion for this kind of hard work may minister to the individual without sharing exact, confidential details.

The conversation may go like this:

"Mary and Joe, our treasurer let me know that you didn't give a gift last year even though you've always been so regular in your support. Is there something that I should know? If there is, how can your church family help?"

Good record keeping helps open conversations for ministry. The warning here is this: Be regular, prayerful, and thoughtful in these opportunities and **do not make it about money!** Make it about caring for the souls in your church family.

### 4. SHOW TANGIBLE GRATITUDE

Whenever I received a gift from my grandparents, I couldn't play with it until I wrote them a thank you letter, approved by my mom or dad! One key identifier that sets Christians apart is gratitude. Each year, for tax purposes, all the donors in your congregation should receive a statement of giving. What would happen if your pastor added a brief, personal note of thanks?

At Mayer Lutheran, every gift receipt comes with a general letter of thanks from me and a personal handwritten note sharing our gratitude to the donor by name. I often follow that up with a personal call—to those who gave small gifts as well as large! When people feel appreciated for their generosity, they tend to keep giving and, often, increase the size of their gift. I know that pastors are extremely busy and may choose not to devote time to this like I do. But acknowledging a gift and showing gratitude from a church leader draws the giver closer to the mission.

### 5. ENCOURAGE ESTATE PLANNING

Our church body has been blessed with many tools to help with gift planning. The LCMS Foundation, for example, can help maximize your estate for the benefit of others, including the church. The District and Synod offices can help you promote and encourage planned giving. Regularly communicate the importance of estate planning. Consider holding a seminar or a joint event of several churches. Baby Boomers, especially, have proven to be extremely generous as a whole, and now that they're entering their golden years, it's time to offer opportunities to learn about planned giving.

~~~

Let me leave you with this reminder: **Thriftiness is NOT a virtue. Generosity is a virtue!** Nowhere in Scripture is thriftiness highly honored. Generosity, on the other hand, is central to Scripture. Consider Romans 8:32: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

The Gospel is where true generosity is found.

Generosity is a Spirit-led endeavor, always preceded by the Gospel. When we put the needs of our congregation and the church at large in an appropriate biblical context, we lay a firm foundation for giving. If your church really wants to raise money, use the Law. It works—in the short run. But the Gospel is where true generosity is found. By regularly, prayerfully nurturing a Gospel-centered culture of generous giving and relying on the truth of Scripture as your guide, conversations will move from self to others, "have-to" to "want-to," and from scarcity to abundance. Truly, the generosity of God's people is a virtue!



Joel Landskroener has served as the executive director at Mayer Lutheran High School since 2006.

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

HEBREWS 10:23-25

What is happening in your life? That probably seems like a crazy question when the obvious answer these days is dealing with COVID-19! The scary part is that life goes on even during this pandemic, and we continue to have our hurts, pains, and struggles. I am seeing and feeling from many a different answer to this question. We are missing our Sunday morning fellowship together to celebrate Word and Sacrament.

I have had more than one person say to me, “I miss coming to church!” We are a Word and Sacrament church body and celebrate this by coming together to hear the Word proclaimed and receive the Sacrament as a body of believers. We are also missing the human contact.

The verses above in Hebrews remind us of why this is so important. We have a confession of hope, and that hope is in the Word, Jesus Christ. How many of us have put our hope into scientists? Or politicians? Even when we turn on the news, we hang onto every word.

We need to remember that our hope is in Jesus Christ, where we find that we are loved and forgiven. Remember His promise to us that, “Lo, I am with you always!” (Matthew 28:20). As we journey through this pandemic, we are not alone, and we lean on Jesus Christ.

We also need to remember to continue meeting together! We need encouragement from other Christians; we need time to talk to each other and to build each other up with words and actions of love and good works. People are aching for touch, sitting next to a friend, and being in fellowship.

For many different reasons, we have stopped—or as our verse says, “neglected”—meeting together, and yes, we have many reasons why. Please understand, your health is most important, and if you have underlying reasons, please stay safe. But many seem to have no problem going out and about, shopping, working, and eating out, yet they are not returning to church.

So, this is what I want us to think about:

1. *What will it take or what will have to happen for you to go back to church?*
2. *What are some ways we can meet and encourage one another other than at church during this pandemic?*



Rev. Tom Evans serves as the senior pastor at Emanuel Lutheran Church in Inver Grove Heights. He is also the second vice president of the Minnesota South District.



COMING SOON:

Engaged in Mission

VIDEO SERIES

Join us in conversations with various multi-ethnic leaders across the Minnesota South District. Learn about their faith journey, how they are engaged in the mission of God in each of their unique contexts, and how you can support them in that mission.



Pictured, left to right, top row: Jeanetta Cooper, Rev. Samuel Deressa, Alfrieda Baldwin, and Rev. Johnny Vang; bottom row: Rev. Vue Lee, Daniel Thao, Kia Thao, and Nader Alaraj.



Minnesota South District
14301 Grand Avenue South
Burnsville, MN 55306

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 139
BURNSVILLE, MN

*Let us hold
fast the
confession
of our hope
without
wavering,
for he who
promised is
faithful.*

HEBREWS 10:23