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Devotional

"And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and the people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil."

- John 3:19

As a child I was quite terrified of the dark. There was simply no telling what sorts of evil lurked in the dark. The light switch for the kitchen was downstairs, and you had to get halfway up the stairs before the light from the upstairs hallway was of any use at all. Those five or six steps were terrifying.

I suspect that's the kind of thing that first comes to mind when we hear, especially in this season of Epiphany, about Jesus as the light of the world. Here he is to save us from those demons that are nipping at our heels as we run up the stairs. That is, indeed, a word of comfort.

But John's gospel tells a different story. The light which enlightens the world is not welcome. People prefer the darkness. How could that be? Darkness is terrifying. How could anyone prefer that?

Except that darkness is pretty handy for hiding things. It's pretty handy for covering things up. And we have plenty that we would like to keep covered up. We cover up our failure, our disappointments, our betrayals, our dysfunctions, our messes. We cover up our sins, or at least we try to. And we don't want anyone uncovering them. We don't want light shining on them. That's the opposite of what we want. We want to keep all that stuff hidden under the cover of darkness. So when Jesus comes bringing his light, suddenly that is even more terrifying to us than the darkness.

The problem is that we're not so great at covering that stuff up. That's why it nips at our heels, chasing us up the stairs at night, leaving us in fear. Everything that we try to cover up with darkness remains a threat to us, even if we think it is carefully stowed away where it will never be found.

But Christ Jesus is throwing off that darkness. Everything we've tried to hide is being exposed to the light. In the short run, that is horrifying to us. We don't want anyone, least of all God, to see all of that. But this is our only

hope. The one who is shining his light into the darkest corners of our hearts is doing that for the sake of our salvation. He is taking upon himself all that hidden darkness, all that sin and rebellion. And in its place is his marvelous light. Our darkness has no chance anymore. The true light, which enlightens everyone, has come into the world. He's come even to you.

Pastor Julie Smith



Samhold Lutheran Church in
Gonvick, MN

What Has An Exposure, Exposed?

One doesn't need to research or report statistics of how many people (world-wide) have been exposed to Covid-19, and all its variants, to know it is of epic proportions. When it comes to the effects of Covid on congregational life, these are many things one hears. There is a general sense of "unease." Things are "off." There is great frustration and overwhelming isolation. It has exacerbated the political and cultural divide. It has brought out the best and the worst in people.

But underneath and beyond all this, it has perhaps exposed something deeper. It has often been argued that cultures are held together by their common story. When that is disrupted, or people don't remember that story, it is replaced by something else. I can't speak as an historian, but I do wonder about (and have some thoughts about) what has replaced the cultural narrative in America. But when it comes to the church, our exposure to a virus has exposed something deeper.

What is the sacred story that holds us together and unites us as Christians? It is all over the Scriptures, but perhaps Psalm 8 is a good place to start. When one sees and contemplates the vastness, wonder and power of God, you can only LOOK UP and ask, "Who am I?" What is my place in this universe, why am I

here, and how does my brief life have meaning in the face of an Eternal God? When we stop asking those questions, it exposes that another story, another narrative, perhaps even another god that has taken over and captured our imaginations and even our lives.

As we move to that more specific story that holds us in unity, the Christmas story, the Christ story, the story of our salvation, I wonder has this also been replaced by another narrative, other fascinations, or other gods? Is this part of what an exposure to a tiny virus has exposed about us? One thinks of how Paul begins his writing to the church in Philippi. Even in his imprisonment and isolation, he is thankful for the partnership he has with fellow believers in the gospel. Has our thankfulness for the gospel been replaced by our fears of something else far less powerful? As Paul ends his letter, there is something else exposed. Paul writes, "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." What are the things upon which we tend to think and focus? Are they true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, praiseworthy?

I wonder if the biggest thing our exposure to a tiny virus has exposed is this: We have largely forgotten the "upward look." We look around and behind and before and within us, but not up. "And when you see these things, Jesus says...look up....lift your heads....your redemption is drawing near."

lives. We have a sacred story that has come near to us, and even defines and holds us. The story has a simple, yet profound sense to it that sounds like this: "For God so loves the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

Pastor Randy Freund, AD Service Coordinator

Without a sense of the One Eternal God beyond us, we lose focus on the very reason and purpose of our



NEEDED!! YOUNG ADULTS!

~ Pastors & Congregations ~

If you know young adults with a passion for ministry, please contact
Randy Freund at director@augustanadistrict.org
- or -
(320)583-3648

Registration Is Now Open!!

2022 Confirmation Retreat



Pause



Play



Refresh

Is your congregation getting your confirmation schedule in place? Would you like to bring your students to the district confirmation retreat along with other students from the district?

This year the retreat will be March 4 - 6, 2022, at Luther Crest camp in Alexandria, MN. The retreat is led by Augustana District pastors, but each congregation is asked to send their own chaperone's to stay for the entire weekend.

The planning team is still working out a few of the details but **registration is now open!**

To register online or download the brochure and/or the emergency contact form, please visit augustanadistrict.org/events/2022-confirmation-retreat/

Church Plant: Faith Community Lutheran Church – Slayton, MN

"We're going to have a worship service in the park." That was the first decision. No one knew exactly who the "we" was at that point. Would it be a dozen people? More? It was anyone's guess. A core group of people just knew they needed to do something. So, with no pastor, and no idea what to expect, they announced on Facebook a worship service to be held the following Sunday in the city park, and prayed that the weather would cooperate.

About 80 people showed up for that first service. But everyone knew that could just be curiosity seekers. Week two, when the park was not available and the service would be held in a seed dealership, would be more telling. Around 85 people showed up. Week three, at a third location, with Facebook the primary means of communication, more than 100 showed up. By week four they hit what would become their typical attendance of 140. That's when people started to think this might be a real thing, and they decided to give it a name – Faith Community Lutheran Church.

The four months since that first worship service can't even be described as a roller coaster. At every step, pieces have fallen into place. A team of neighboring clergy, generously shared by their congregations, have helped cover weekend services. A regular space for worship became available at

minimal cost. All sorts of furnishings and resources were either donated by other congregations or made/purchased by participants in the new church. An additional space for education became available at no cost. On Reformation Day a dozen young people were confirmed. A bustling Sunday School program is up and running.

On December 19, the congregation voted unanimously to join LCMC and adopt a new constitution and by-laws. More than 250 people will be listed as charter members of Faith Community Lutheran Church. But the numbers only tell a small part of the story. Many in the congregation have observed in themselves, and others, a renewed connection to their faith. People who had little interest in volunteering before were finding new ways to share their gifts. Bible study groups are in the process of forming. Teams are getting put together to provide leadership for various areas of the church's work.

As the new year begins, Faith Community Lutheran Church will begin the process of calling a pastor to join them in their mission. The work that God has begun among His people is a wonder to behold. His steadfast Word has brought them this far and will see them through whatever lies ahead.

Pastor Julie Smith



Thank you, Pastor Julie, for the support, work, pastoral service, and just being there. What you have done for our congregation has truly been a blessing to all of us. We praise God to be so blessed to have you guide and lead us in becoming a new church.

Jerry Moline, President of Faith Community Lutheran Church

The Augustana District would also like to thank Pastors Jennifer Bennett, Sara Carlstrom, Greg Pavek, and pastoral intern Brian Lauer for stepping in to lead services during Faith's pastoral search. Thank you also to these pastors' congregations and leadership for supporting Faith Community Lutheran Church in this way.

A Word From WOW

Our WOW Spotlight this month will introduce you to the Chairperson of the Augustana District WOW chapter, Jane Evers.

I, Jane, am a member of New Hope Lutheran Church in Comfrey, MN. Our women's group is already planning to host the 2022 WOW Annual Gathering. We are excited to host this event.

I have three grown children and six grandchildren that I really enjoy. I was married for 45 years before the love of my life passed away from cancer.

I taught school and served as a K-12 librarian for 35 years. I also served on the public library board and after the tornado destroyed both buildings, I was involved in joining the two libraries. We now have a school/public library located in the school and open to the public.

I retired in 2005 and my husband and I spent several years living and traveling in our RV. During that time, I was able to work at Disney World, I substitute taught in Florida and we worked at a large Flea Market in Arizona.

When I moved to Comfrey, I was welcomed into the church like they were family and close friends. I have participated in many Bible studies throughout the years and have learned a lot. I also find being able to serve others has been very uplifting and meaningful for my life.

I enjoy reading, quilting, volunteering, and travel. I volunteer in our church in many capacities. I am

active in entering and running the program that allows us to put the current bulletin and service order on the screen for the worship service. I attend and at times lead Bible Studies. I also volunteer at our local food shelf as well as serving on the food shelf board and have been the food shelf coordinator. I am a member of the church quilt group. I have taught Sunday School and been involved in VBS. I am active in our women's group as well as belonging to Naomi Circle, serving as St. John's Nursing Home Auxiliary representative, have made soup for our Lenten Soup Suppers, I served on our local church council, I have taught Sunday School and VBS. I still enjoy travel but don't do much now that I am alone.



Graduating Seniors with their quilts

Our WOW is involved in many activities. Every Sunday we serve coffee after church and use the funds raised to help support the church's mission projects. We host a Lenten Soup Supper during Lent; we pack Christmas bags for shut-ins that includes food and a Christmas gift. Our women's group also make quilts for our graduating seniors and babies baptized during the year. When our local Assisted Living Home was open, we supported them by organizing card games, bingo, and a yearly Christmas party. We also hosted a birthday party and bingo party for St John's Nursing Home. We serve the lunch at funerals and send cards to shut-ins, anyone who has been ill, and to families

of those who have passed away. We choose three different mission projects each year and have fund raising activities that help support each of them on a quarterly basis with the fourth quarter supporting Operation Christmas Child by filling and packing shoeboxes for children. We also provide money for shipping these boxes through a fundraiser.



Hidden Treasure

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."
-2 Corinthians 4:7

May 5 - 7, 2022 at Mt. Carmel in Alexandria, MN.

THE WORD ALONE

Thursday, May 5, 2022

"Where's the Truth"

7:00PM - 9:00PM

For those who are in, or interested in, ministry.

THE PREACHED WORD

Friday, May 6, 2022

"Luther's Outlaw God"

9:00AM - 4:00PM

Annual Convocation of the Cross

THE SENT WORD

Saturday, May 7, 2022

"Jesus' Life/Our Bodies"

10:00AM - 4:00PM

Annual District Convention

Combined Events of
**CONVOCATION &
CONVENTION**

**New in
2022**
**One Trip
Two Great Events**

*While the emphasis for this evening session focuses on raising up the next generation of ministry leaders, all pastors are encouraged to invite ANYONE interested in parish ministry.



**Registration
NOW OPEN**
**Limited Space
so please register
soon!**

Congregational Services

There are Staff Openings on the AD website so if you know someone who is seeking a position, please share this information. Don't forget that if your congregation has an opening you can easily post it directly to the AD website on the Church Staff Openings page (under the Church tab) by filling out a simple form.



CURRENT OPENINGS:

- Pastor | New Creation Lutheran Church | Perham MN
- Part-time Pastor | Our Redeemer Lutheran, Church, Badger MN
- Full-time Pastor | St. John's Lutheran Church | Springfield MN
- Full-time Pastor | Hope Lutheran Church | Huron SD

Financial Update

*Together
We Can!*

As the district looks to 2022 and beyond, we are welcoming new congregations, supporting new congregational starts,

continuing our 2020 Initiative (youth leadership, church plants, and campus ministry), in addition to minding Church, Theology, Mission. As we move forward with these projects, we need manpower to answer this call. The Augustana District continues to grow. The time, effort, and resources required to

serve the growing district are steadily increasing. The District Coordinator position now requires fulltime but is only supported parttime. Less than 40% of congregations consistently support the district financially. Please prayerfully consider the Augustana District's growing need for support as you plan your personal and church budgets for the upcoming year. The district greatly appreciates your prayers, support, and volunteers. We pray God's blessings for your church as He continues to work through you to accomplish His will.



PAYMENTS

Powered by **stripe**



Welcome to STRIPE! We have decided to switch to STRIPE payment gateway for credit/debit card processing of online registrations and donations. It is as secure as PayPal and offers more administrative record keeping flexibility on the back-end. This was not a security issue decision, but we did want to let you know that there are new changes for online

registration and donations. If you have questions or concerns, please let us know by contacting us at office@augustanadistrict.org. You can still use a debit or credit card and do not need a Stripe account to donate or register.

Mission Focus: Tabor Evangelists Project

"And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus". -Acts 5:42



Former outreach center at Aliwoyo is now a congregation!



Lay Evangelist Training conducted by Pastor Messeret



Congregational Outreach Program at Besekollaia

Pandemics and politics have been the reality for many countries this past year, including Ethiopia, the site of one of Augustana's Key Mission Partners: Tabor Congregation of Awassa. Despite these battles, like the Apostles of the early church, the Evangelists we help to send out in Ethiopia, "have not ceased teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus"!

In a recent report, Pastor Messeret (lead pastor of Tabor), acknowledged the hardships that Covid outbreaks and political turmoil had affected their outreach, yet this neither lessened their urgency nor zeal to raise up and train evangelists to preach the Gospel. From last year's reporting to the most recent, they have both added Mission Outreach Posts with Lay Evangelists as well as upgraded two more posts into now independent congregations!

Augustana has been in a formal partnership with Tabor's Evangelist Project since 2014. Our role has been to help support their evangelical outreach into regions underserved by Christians. We had sought to support half of the average salary of a lay evangelist, which then was \$1,440, but that was when they had under 30 deployed evangelists. This year they have 66 evangelists of which two of them are female. Depending on their level of training evangelists now makes an average of \$2,640 per year. Every dollar that you send through Augustana ear-marked for this

Key Mission Partner is directed to help Tabor continue to deploy evangelists "to teach and preach that the Christ is Jesus"!

Congregations and individuals have been quite faithful in their designated giving to the Evangelist Project, with over \$40,000 given from January to the end of November of 2021. This is down \$3,000 from the same time last year, but we are confident that end of the calendar year giving will bring us back on track.

If you wish to have more information about the Tabor Evangelist Project, I happen to know some folks that you can talk to or invite to come to your congregation and share.

Pastor Tom Christenson

Board for World Missions



P.S. – This picture shows part of the help we were able to send to the North Central Synod of Ethiopia, as they ministered those displaced by political insurrection. When the area of

Dessie came under attack, we put a temporary halt to sending funds to ensure that your gifts were safe. Dessie is now secure again, and we will forward the remaining dollars from the NCES Crisis Fund. Our goal had been to raise \$10,000.....but your generosity came to \$50,000!

Prayers

- ✝ We give thanks for Your Light in our world, and eternal thanks that the world's darkness cannot overcome it.
- ✝ May the Church's mission be blessed, and Christ's Good News amplified in the worldly new year.
- ✝ Blessings to Faith Lutheran Community Church – Slayton – may God's gracious hand continue to guide; may Christ's love continue to shine in the community; and may the Spirit continue to draw and enlighten. Draw in those in the surrounding community who are without the rudder of Christ. Shine the light of your love in all the places where shadows and darkness are lurking.
- ✝ Thanks and praise for the many traditions we exercised during this Christmas season. Help us to continue to hold the sacred story in fear, love, and trust of God. Give us strong voice to speak against the false gods and securities that this world offers. May we continue to seek Christ and to share our gifts with our family, neighbors, and the world.
- ✝ Give our congregations and individual members understanding of our missions and purpose; provide the financial means to carry out your will.
- ✝ Strengthen and direct those who are in leadership roles – thank you for their servant hearts.
- ✝ Thank you for the fruit of the gospel that has been sown throughout all the world. Thank you for the examples of efforts through all missions that we support, including the Tabor Evangelist Project. We claim the promise that your Word will return to You with great bounty.



Limited
Space

Save The
Dates

Registration
Open

Confirmation Retreat
2022 Convocation/AD Convention
2022 WoW Gathering

March 4 - 6, 2022
May 5 - 7, 2022
September 17, 2022

Registration is open!
Registration is open!
Registration is NOT open



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Address Service Requested



DISASTER RELIEF EFFORTS

From tornadoes to fire to floods the LCMC Disaster Relief Efforts can be supported via the LCMC website at <https://www.lcmc.net/relief-funds/summaries>

If you have any questions please contact Cathy Nichol at LCMC via email at cathy@lcmc.net. She is actively collecting a list of congregations who want to help others and those LCMC congregations in need of that help.

Thank you in advance for any assistance you can provide, and remember to pray for the victims, the relief efforts, and those who are aiding those in need.