

From Pastor Bob...



I share with you a prayer written by Obie Wright Jr.:

“God of all good life, on our journey toward Easter, cleanse our hearts of every desire to mimic the violence of wrongs that befall us. Save us from becoming the evil we hate. Save us from denial of abuses which daily crucify Christ afresh. Drive away the chilling cold, the wintry frost, of numbing detachment from others’ pain, and our own hurts also. Breathe, O breathe Your empowering Spirit in the troubled hearts of Your children. Hear our prayer, in the name of Jesus, the Shining Way, the Truth, and the life. Amen.”

To be sure, we are on the way to Easter! This is a time that always brims with hope as we and the land around us make ready to be freed from the clutches of winter!

This year we also move with an extra measure of discernment about where we are planted. Our roots go back to the dust and dirt of Genesis. We have been watered in the baptism commissioned by Jesus. We know we are God’s people called to be on the move in service of Him. That is at the core of our conviction and calling. As we move beyond that core we come into additional designations to which we have ascribed. We are Lutheran. We are ELCA Lutheran.

I have had the latter designation recently called into question. The assertion was made that it is more Pastor Dahl who is ELCA and not the congregation. To be sure, I am an ELCA pastor. My official Letter of Call and the constitution of our church calls me into covenant (sacred promise) to work with and for the church body known as the ELCA. The same is true of the congregation. When the ELCA was formed back in 1988, this congregation made the decision to be part of the church-wide body known as the ELCA. Our constitution calls us to work with and for the goals of the ELCA by way of our time, talent and treasure. That decision and commitment was made and it has not changed. There are ways in which it can be changed, but such actions have not been taken and are not scheduled to be taken.

It is my calling and definitely my intention to live out my years as an ELCA pastor. I do not see the assembly vote as a piece that should drive us into division. Even so, I realize that division could come. My hope and prayer is that we can find our way together in Christ. He is the Living Word and the ultimate authority on how we understand what God wants us to know. In the Gospel of John, chapter 17, Jesus prays that we might be one

even as He and the Father are one. It is very clear that the mission of Jesus included the gathering of even those considered to be outcasts.

In order for the congregation to leave the ELCA, such a motion would have to pass by a 2/3 majority at two special meetings of the congregation. By instruction of our constitution, those days would have to have calendar separation of at least 90 days. If those votes met that measure, this congregation would no longer be an ELCA congregation. The congregation would next have to decide if and how to affiliate with another body and they would have to go through a call process for the services of a pastor. Choosing to sever from the ELCA would mean that no ELCA pastor would be available to serve. Pastors can also sever from the ELCA and if such a move were made by someone currently on the ELCA roster, they would become eligible to serve.

In all of this, our hope and prayer is for our many members being able to continue as one body here at First Lutheran. The struggle we have over sexuality issues in our culture is quite staggering. We keep working and praying our way as we deal with the difficulties of divorce, single parenting, couples in union outside of marriage, and the steady demise of faithfulness in relationship. The challenges keep coming. In all of them, we try to find our way within the framework of grace. Without that framework, the Psalmist is clear as to what would be: “If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, who could stand?” We surely invite you to stand with First Lutheran and the ELCA.

Much disruption has come out of a decision that wouldn’t have had to change a thing for the way we serve the Lord. We are not required to call any pastor whom we consider to be less than a good fit for our congregation.

May we move ahead in hope. May we move ahead in mission. May we move ahead, above all, in Christ who subjected himself to brokenness to save us from ours.

First Lutheran Mission Statement:

We are believers seeking to invite all into the caring, sharing and growing ways of Christ!

Pastor Jeff Engholm, Synod Minister

Pastor Jeff Engholm of our synod office in Redwood Falls will be with us on Thursday, February 11th at 7:00 p.m. This gathering will take place in the sanctuary. Pastor Engholm will speak to the assembly action taken regarding ordination as well as to the formation of the ELCA, Call to Common Mission and The Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust Social Statement. Pastor Engholm is in his position by way of support from our congregation as well as sister ELCA congregations across southwest Minnesota. It is a strength of our synod system that as we have questions and issues, we can call upon our synod office and they readily come to help us without charge to the congregation for time or mileage. Please come and be part of this opportunity for sharing and growth.

Food for the Poor

Many weeks ago, we received a request to have a pastor come tell us about a relief effort known as Food for the Poor. So it is that Pastor William Mentor will come and tell us about the work they do on the weekend of February 20 and 21. He will be with us for all services at no cost to the congregation. It is interesting to note that this group has for some time had a strong presence in Haiti. Because of that, they had a force of people there and ready to bring immediate help as best they could when the earthquake hit. We are told time and again that the situation in Haiti is even more desperate than it appears from the televised coverage. With this visit we will learn more about ways in which we can give support to the relief efforts being delivered to these Haitian people so traumatized by this catastrophic quake.

Please see additional information elsewhere in the newsletter on the Larry Olson benefit concert planned on the evening of the 21st here at First Lutheran. The proceeds of that concert will be awarded to the work of Food for the Poor in Haiti.

Lent begins on February 17th, Ash Wednesday

We will have two worship services on Ash Wednesday with one service at 4:30 p.m. and the other at 6:30 p.m. Once again, our youth will be serving Lenten suppers. After Ash Wednesday, we will have one service each Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. Our theme this year is “Book of Faith.” We are joining with the pastors at St. Stephen and will seek to explore how the Bible speaks to us in terms of mission, instruction, vision, comfort and hope. We invite you to a midweek Lenten discipline of worship!

Stewardship

Our stewardship committee thanks you for giving prayerful consideration to your support of the ministry in and through First Lutheran! Now is the time to check again and make sure you are enacting whatever adjustments you have decided upon for 2010.

We are well aware of a downturn in financial stewardship. Some folks have moved. Some have lost their job. Some have decided to withhold offerings as an expression of dissent over the ELCA assembly action last August.

What do we do in face of all this? We will know more after the first quarter of giving is on record. At that time, we may have to consider some significant changes in our ministry structure. That would translate into cutting some portion or portions.

It could also be that the portion of our church body that is still gainfully employed (and that is thankfully the vast majority)... and it could be that the portion of our church body that holds firm to the position that we can continue to be the ELCA and work through our issues...it could be that these portions would step forward with an even more disciplined response of financial stewardship. The decision to withhold funds does more than send a message. It also cuts at real people in real places who are also our neighbors. We are at a place where jobs hang in the balance. We are at a place where helping ministries hang in the balance. The loss of funding does cause hardship and hurt and this largely descends upon people who had nothing to do with the assembly vote.

The withholding of funds does send a message. It also does these other things. Our request is that you consider the whole impact of your action.

Questions come about the uncertainties and how we can possibly project ahead. I find that to be something like the fellow who came to the village wise man with a question. He held his hand behind his back and asked the wise man if the sparrow in his hand was dead or alive. He was sure that he could show the wise man wrong with a simple squeeze of his hand if the wise man said “alive” or with a simple release of his hand if the wise man said “dead.” The wise man answered his young challenger with the words, “It’s up to you!” The Lord has given this church life. We are in a time of either squeezing down or offering up. There is much in our hands.

As you may find yourself able to become more disciplined and even more generous in your giving in order to offset the response of withholding, we will be most grateful.

Church Council to Organize and Plan

On February 9th we will hold the first meeting of our newly elected council members and officers along with those who continue to serve. A light meal will be served at 5:30 p.m. with orientation and agenda commencing at 6:00 p.m. Committees will have opportunity to do organizing, goal setting and planning. We will have much important business to conduct as we chart our course for the balance of 2010! Be sure to be there!

From Intern Pastor Jackie

“If I have a hope, it’s that God sat over the dark nothing and wrote you and me, specifically, into the story, and put us in with the sunset and the rainstorm as though to say, *Enjoy your place in my story. The beauty of it means you matter, and you can create within it even as I have created you.*” – Donald Miller, *A Million Miles In A Thousand Years*
We are surrounded every day by stories – almost every TV show and movie, most songs, even our conversations with friends and co-workers – all of these are stories. We rarely think of our own lives as a story in which we are living, and yet, each of us longs to be surrounded by a great cast of characters, to find our own unique purpose in life, and to leave a legacy that will live on after we leave this world. Aren’t the same things that make a great story the things that make a great life?

As Christians we believe that God is telling a wondrous story of the creation and redemption of the universe in and through Jesus Christ. We believe that God calls us to follow Jesus, and that in our baptism, every day the old, sinful self dies and the new person we are in Christ is born yet again. We find this story in Scripture and see reflections of it in the world around us every day.

What’s your story?

What is God’s story?

And what is your role in the story that God is telling the world?

In February and March here at First Lutheran, we will be starting an exciting series to help you start thinking about your own story, God’s story, and your unique and special role in God’s ever-unfolding story. We will be meeting for eight weekly sessions starting **Sunday, February 7 at 9:45 in the Fireside Room**. You don’t need to bring anything but yourself! Please feel free to contact Pastor Jackie if you have any questions!

CHURCH COUNCIL UPDATE

January Meeting 2010

Giving in 2009 was around \$50,000 less than expected in the 2009 Financial Plan. December giving was very healthy, which helped the church’s bottom line for the year. The 2010 Financial Plan was included in the January Parish Visitor giving everyone a chance to study it before the vote at the annual meeting.

There will be an information meeting on Thursday, February 11th at 7pm at First Lutheran, given by the SW Minnesota Synod staff, providing more information on how the ELCA was formed, the Call to Common Mission, and the statement on Human Sexuality. Members of St. Stephen Lutheran Church will be invited. An invitation will also be extended at the next conference pastors’ meeting.

Annual Council Retreat – The 2010 church council retreat will be held on Tuesday, February 9th, which is the regular council meeting night. The retreat will begin with a light supper at 5:30 p.m., followed by committee meetings and a full council meeting. All council members are strongly encouraged to mark their calendars and set this night aside for this important event.

Annual Congregational Meeting 2010

Nominating Committee Report / Election of New Council Members: Tom Nordby thanked council members who have served / completed their term. The new candidates were introduced: President – Shelly Maes, Vice President – Jason Swenson, Secretary – Marlene Nordby, Treasurer – Pam Russell (appointed by the council). Education Committee: Christine Versaevel and Allison Winkelman; Evangelism Committee: Tracy Peterson and Heather Rokeh; Property & Management Committee: Dan Marks and Mike Ponstein; Social Ministries Committee: Cathy Berg and Bea Olsen; Stewardship Committee: Linda Bloom-Scott, Sheldon Kimpling, Karl Porisch, and Chris Ulrich; Worship and Music Committee: Jill Kontz and Brian Kruse; Youth & Family Ministry Committee: Laura Atkinson and Beth Roelfsema; Nominating Committee: Karen Bierman, Bob Fenske, and Kitsi Marks. A listing of all First Lutheran Council Members will be made available soon.

Approval of 2010 Financial Plan: The plan was included in the January Parish Visitor for all to review. After brief discussion, the 2010 Financial Plan was approved. The plan will be

monitored closely during the year, and if necessary, amended and presented again to the full congregation.

By-Law Changes: Proposed changes to the by-laws have been available for several months for congregation members to review. Changes were approved as presented.

Ad-hoc Education Task Force Update: The task force met and due to the differing of opinions, the current task force will not be meeting again. Congregation members asked that the ad-hoc committee be re-established to help arrange for more information to be shared with the entire congregation.

Benevolence

As First Lutheran has made a decision to be a tithing congregation, First Lutheran gives 10% of its general fund contributions to Ministry and Benevolence each month—things such as SW MN Synod, Shetek Bible Camp, Lutheran Social Services, and SMSU Campus Ministry. Ten percent of that 10% goes to “other benevolence”, which supports local organizations.

Below is a list of recipients for 2009:

Faith Comes By Hearing, Bible Sticks for troops; \$1,000

Synod Assembly—World Hunger; \$500

Synod Assembly—Prisoners of Hope Ministry; \$200

Synod Assembly—Peace Lutheran Church, Slidell, LA; \$200

Synod Assembly—Leadership Fund; \$200

Prairie Conference HIV/AIDS Coordinator (Africa); \$100

Oak Grove High School, Fargo (the only ELCA high school in the country); \$400

Gillette Children’s Mobile Outreach Clinic; \$400

Dakota Boys Ranch, Minot, ND; \$400

First Lutheran Church Stewardship Committee; \$1,000

Kitchen Table Food Shelf, Marshall, MN; \$500

Heart-to-Heart, Marshall, MN; \$500

Marshall Area Ministerial Assn, Marshall, MN; \$400

Be looking for a benevolence update in each Parish Visitor.

Social Ministries Outreach

February will be RED month for the food shelf. Examples are beets, ketchup, cherry pie filling, fruit punch. If you can’t find something red any food item will work.

Thanks for all your past support and please keep giving as the demand is way up. Their client base has doubled and there is a great need out there right now.

We serve at Esther’s Kitchen the third Thursday of every month. Our church provides workers to make the meal and we also make the desserts. There is a fellowship time from 5-6 and from 6-7 the meal is served. Remember this is a free community meal open to all. The number of people attending is also starting to grow so please consider giving of your time to come and help or come to eat.

The sewing group has been busy with many donations over the past few months. We have provided 40 bundles to LLMPH, WRAP and the Food Shelf. We also provided 17 blankets to Parkside to be given to families for Christmas gifts. There was also an essentials tree at Christmas. All the items from this project were donated to Parkside and Westside. If anyone has any fabric etc they would like to donate or if anyone would like to join our sewing group please call Linda at 929-3842.

Last but not least I need to talk about the garden spot. It is that time of year where we need to commit to having it or let it go. We do not want to let it go as the Food Shelf loved all our fresh produce and since their demand is up I’m sure they would appreciate it again this year. But without your help this won’t be possible. We need workers to go out and plant, weed, etc. PLEASE consider giving your time to this very worthy project. A decision will have to be made by February 14th if we keep it or not so please call Linda at 929-3842 if you can help.

It’s Senior Class Pictures Time again!!

If you have gotten your class of 2010 senior pictures taken or are going to be taking them soon...please remember to bring in a wallet size picture for our Class composite. Thanks!



Dakota Road
“Food for the Poor” Concert

Sunday February 21st
 @ 6:30 PM
 First Lutheran Church

*100% of your free-will offering will
 be given “FOOD FOR THE POOR”*

Dakota Road will debut many songs from their new
 CD “Break These Chains”.

Dakota Road has become known nationally for their stirring original music and playful performance style. They craft powerful stories of life and faith woven in colorful musical styles ranging from acoustic ballads to rocking anthems. Their songs of struggle and hope connect with people of all ages and walks of life.

For more info: www.dakotaroadmusic.com Or the church office 532-2429

YOUTH SPONSORED SPRING FUNDRAISERSILENT AUCTION AND MEAL!

The month of March promises to put the FUN in FUNdraiser! We will have a Silent Auction filled with various items and services for you to bid on. Anyone is welcome to put something on the auction to help out the youth! Bidding will start on Saturday March 6th from 5:30-7 pm . We will finish up on Sunday March 21st for lunch and run until 1pm to celebrate the close of the bidding and announce whose bids were the top. Auction items will be publicized soon as well as the meal and prices.

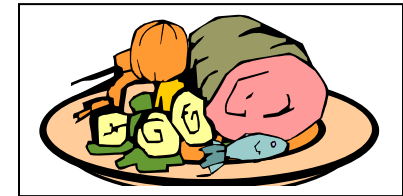
As you remember, the youth and family ministries committee is trying a new format for fundraising in the church by only having a fall and spring fundraiser. We are hoping to be able to raise the funds needed with just that AND help you out so that we aren't ALWAYS selling something. Thanks for supporting the youth!! We definitely need you all!

Annual Youth Sponsored Lenten Suppers are Scheduled again!!

Help support Youth and Family Ministry at First Lutheran! Enjoy a nice warm meal together as a family. Invite your friends to join you too.

Meals are served from 5:00 -6:15 pm in the Fellowship Hall

Cost:	12 and up	\$6.00
	Ages 5-11	\$4.00
	Ages 4 and under	\$2.00
	Family Cap	\$20.00



Menus are as follows:

Ash Wednesday, Feb 17	Wild Rice Soup or Chili, Bread, and Veggies, Cheese, Cookie/Bar
Wednesday, Feb 24	Baked Potato Buffet, Salad, and Cookie/Bar
Wednesday, Mar 3	Pasta, Breadsticks, Salad and Cookie/Bar
Wednesday, Mar 10	Tacos (hard, soft, and walking), Nachos, Salad, and Cookie/Bar
Wednesday, Mar 17	BBQs, Baked Beans, Chips, and Cookie/Bar
Wednesday, Mar 24	Hot Dish, Fruit, Dinner Roll and Cookie/Bar

THANKS FOR SUPPORTING THE YOUTH AND FAMILY MINISTRY!!

Proceeds from these suppers go to support *general* programming of the youth and family ministry of First Lutheran and the youth of all ages.

Women of First Lutheran

Our Mission “Mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ

First Lutheran Women are created in the image of God and have committed ourselves to “grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world”

Join us on **Sunday, February 28th at 2:00** in viewing the DVD, “**Created in the Image of God-a community of women.** And that’s exactly what you’ll see in this video: amazing, inspiring groups of faith-filled women responding to God’s call. **Women of Empathy** who provide quilts to those in need. **Women of Prayer** who faithfully participate in Bible Study’s and prayer. **Young Women of Heart** who take time away from their busy schedules to reach out to each other when they see their friends in need. **Courageous Women** who advocate for safety for all women and children by supporting organizations like: New Horizon’s Crisis Center, WRAP, etc. And **Women of Faith** who practice a loyal stewardship that continues our Lutheran legacy and allows First Lutheran Women to flourish and grow.

Following the viewing of the video, there will be time for discussion while we enjoy coffee, juice and treats. ALL women are encouraged to attend, 16 through 100 year olds! If child care is needed, please let Dawn Planting know (507-423-1465) so that arrangements can be made to allow ALL women to join us.

Following our successful quilt and Bakeless Bake sale’s we are looking for organizations that are in need of funding. If you have any ideas please let Dawn know.

On a cold blustery day, around 20 women joined together on Wed. Jan 20th for some quilting, coffee and fellowship to celebrate our own Amy Olson’s 100th Birthday. Thank you Amy for sharing some of your wonderful memories with us.

On Monday, January 4th we joined together for some warm soup and fellowship before our first quilting of the year. If anyone would like to join us, we gather from 1-4 on the 1st Monday and 3rd Wednesday of each month, we enjoy each other’s fellowship, coffee and of course, quilting. Please feel free to join us either of these days. The coffee and treats are served around 2:30.

Join us for Quilting Monday, Feb. 1 and Wed., Feb. 17 from 1-4 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall.

Circles meet on February 10 - contact Dawn Planting for further information about the Circle Bible Study groups – 507-423-1465.