

Trinity Tribune

Trinity Lutheran Church ✠ Paola, Kansas



2017

November



The Kingdom Ours Remaineth

A member of Trinity recently expressed concern to me about declining American church membership and attendance. I explained that our own church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, is one of the few Protestant groups in America that has at least been holding steady—which is good news compared to the situation with most other bodies.

- The Episcopal Church was at one time the most prominent Protestant church body in America, with some 3.4 million members in 1967. Fifty years later that has been more than cut in half, down to only 1.4 million members—and falling fast. At their current rate of decline, the once mighty Episcopal Church will basically cease to exist sometime this century.
- Since it was formed through merger in 1983, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. has lost an astonishing 53% of its members, from an initial 3.1 million to only 1.4 million in 2016. At their current rate of losing around 100,000 members per year, this is another once venerable church body that will soon essentially cease to exist.
- When the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was formed by merger in 1988, at 5.2 million members they were twice the size of the LCMS. In the years since, they have lost 33% of their members and now have just 3.5 million. A few years ago the National Council of Churches reported that the ELCA had “the sharpest rate

of membership decline” among all American church bodies. Like Avis car rental, which used to advertise “*We’re Number 2—But We Try Harder!*” the LCMS has historically always been the *second*-largest American Lutheran church body. However, at the ELCA’s current rate of losing members, in just decades the LCMS could surpass the ELCA as the largest American Lutheran church body, and a few decades after that the ELCA will also cease to exist.

LCMS membership declined 1.75% from 2014 to 2015, the last years for which figures were available—but average weekly church attendance actually *increased* 7%. It may surprise you to learn that, proportionally, the LCMS is actually one of the most successful church bodies in America at attracting new members from the outside, even ranking above the nation’s largest Protestant body, the Southern Baptist Convention. However, these increases from outside the LCMS are offset by long-term demographic decreases within the LCMS—an aging population and lower birth rate—nationwide trends that are similarly affecting many other American groups and organizations.

These denominations were all subtly sick for a long time with the spiritual cancer of theological liberalism, doubting and gradually rejecting more and more of Holy Scripture. Recently, this spiritual cancer has exposed itself.

Though the Mormons are not actually a Christian church body but an unchristian cult, they have the highest level of outside recruitment of any American religious

group. This is due largely to their legalistic demand that all young people devote two years full-time going door-to-door on behalf of their cult. And yet, despite that extreme effort they engage in, if the LCMS level of growth from the outside was raised to that of the Mormons, it would only add about 3,800 additional new members per year.

So, while we certainly desire and prefer that the Lord would be “*adding to their number daily those who were being saved*” (Acts 2:47) and the LCMS would be increasing numerically, we can be thankful that at least we are basically holding steady in comparison with other American Protestant denominations.

What has led to the near demise of these church bodies? When my father was about my age he began running a fever for a few hours each afternoon. The doctor did every test but couldn’t find anything, and finally told Dad that some people just have such a cycle. However, a few years later he was diagnosed with lung cancer, and the doctor said, “I always suspected you had cancer somewhere in your system. That’s what your body was trying to fight with a fever. I couldn’t diagnose it because I couldn’t find it, but now it has exposed itself in the form of lung cancer.”

In the same way, these denominations and their predecessor bodies were all subtly sick for a long time with the spiritual cancer of theological liberalism, doubting and gradually rejecting more and more of Holy Scripture. Recently, this spiritual cancer has exposed itself, particularly in the form of acceptance and endorsement of homosexuality, in blatant contradiction to Scripture. It’s not a mere coincidence that the ELCA’s biggest membership loss, over 500,000 members in just two years, came right after their 2009 approval of so-called “gay marriage.”

The delegates to the ELCA national convention—chosen in a way that ensures they will skew liberal—may have voted “Yes,” but the people in the pews are voting with their feet a resounding “No.” The story is the same with these other sharply declining church bodies.

Not that the LCMS is perfect. We have had our own struggles. In the 1960s and early 1970s we had our own liberal leadership that tried to steer us down the same destructive path taken by these other denominations. Thankfully, our democratic church structure made it possible for conservative pastors and laity to, as the saying goes, “*Stand athwart history and yell, ‘STOP!’*” This culminated in 1974 with those liberal leaders deciding to leave the LCMS, sadly convincing to go with them several hundred congregations and approximately 180,000 lay members, eventually becoming part of the ELCA.

At the time, this split seemed like a mortal blow to the beloved Missouri Synod. However, it turned out these events actually served to excise the cancer of theological liberalism that would have eventually killed us, like it is these other denominations. While they have grown more and more liberal and unscriptural, the LCMS by the grace of God has held steadfast to God’s Word.

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Is there any hope for these dying denominations? Their top-down structure, often imposed very heavy-handedly, makes it practically impossible for more conservative clergy and laity to reverse the course of these bodies. Smaller new bodies have been formed by those leaving them, but tragically they often take with them the very cavalier attitude toward Scripture that caused the problem. In particular, nearly all of the “break away” groups have kept the practice of ordaining females as pastors, which is not permitted by Scripture. When you start off your new church body by saying, “Even though Scripture says this can’t be done, we’re doing it anyway,” that attitude eats away like a cancer at all your teaching, and eventually they’ll end up in exactly the same rotten condition as the church bodies they left.

At the time this seemed like a mortal blow to the Missouri Synod, but these events actually excised the cancer of theological liberalism that would have eventually killed us.

The only hope was expressed by German theologian Franz Delitzsch in 1839, for the 300th anniversary of the introduction of the Reformation in Leipzig, Germany: “*I confess without shame that in matters of faith I am 300 years behind our time, because I came to see, after wandering a long time in the mazes of error, that truth is one and indeed eternal, immutable, and that, since it is revealed by God, it is not in need of any sifting and improvement. . . I preach to you retrogression: Return to the Word of God, which you have forsaken.*”

I thought about all this while enjoying the wonderful Reformation 500th Anniversary Hymn Festival that was held at Kaufman Center for the entire Kansas City area, hosted by the LCMS congregations in Johnson and Miami Counties, and supported by a generous grant from our congregation. In Martin Luther’s famous hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” the traditional translation, “*The Word they still shall let remain, nor*

any thanks have for it” means that, despite all the ravages and ravings of those who doubt and reject it, God’s Word and its teachings *will* endure.

Adjacent to the church where Martin Luther preached in Wittenberg, Germany, the LCMS recently opened the International Luther Center, a conference and study center, hostel, and missionary outpost. It includes a small chapel where daily English services are held. A few months ago two young men came in during the service and sat in the back.

After the service the center director introduced herself. They explained they were a newly-ordained Roman Catholic priest and a seminarian in the Lutheran state church of Germany, who had gone to university together. The Lutheran seminarian said that he really should leave the liberal state church and join our LCMS partner in Germany, because that is what he really believes, but at this time family considerations hold him back.

He then explained the wonderful reason why they had stopped by the LCMS center that day, as he was giving his friend a tour of historic sites in Wittenberg related to Luther and the Reformation: “*I wanted to show him that after 75 years of Nazism, Communism, and liberalism, finally there are Lutherans back in Wittenberg who really are Lutheran, who still believe what Martin Luther did.*”

What are you thankful for this Thanksgiving? As we celebrate the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, I am thankful to be part of a church body that still believes what Martin Luther did! As Luther wrote, “*A mighty fortress is our God. . . the kingdom ours remaineth.*”

Pastor Kevin Vogts

**COMMUNION
SUNDAYS**

As has been customary, thru March we will again have extra services of Holy Communion, on both the 1st and 3rd Sundays, providing an extra opportunity to receive the Sacrament during the more stormy months.

Building for the Future

Revised Building Project Approved

At the Voters Assembly last month a revised plan was approved for our building project. A brochure explaining changes in the revised plan, with new floor plans and exterior sketches, is available in the overflow area or online at www.trinitylcms.org/building.

The new plan keeps all the same features as the original proposal, but moves the addition to the north of the existing building. The building is currently "L" shaped and will become "T" shaped, with the existing wing to the south duplicated to the north. Though this change was made to avoid disrupting our existing septic system, the new layout actually blends better with our current building.

Items added to the project since the original proposal include new sheetrock ceiling, recessed lighting, and windows for the basement, and three new HVAC systems for all levels of the west part of the building.

Over the next several months full architectural drawings and engineering plans will be prepared, bids secured, and *Lord willing* construction will begin in the spring, with completion and dedication in the fall. The sketch below shows how the addition will appear from the road.



Thanksgiving Day Service

Bring Your Family and Guests to Celebrate Thanksgiving
at Trinity, Thursday, November 23, 10:00am

All Invited — Everyone Welcome!

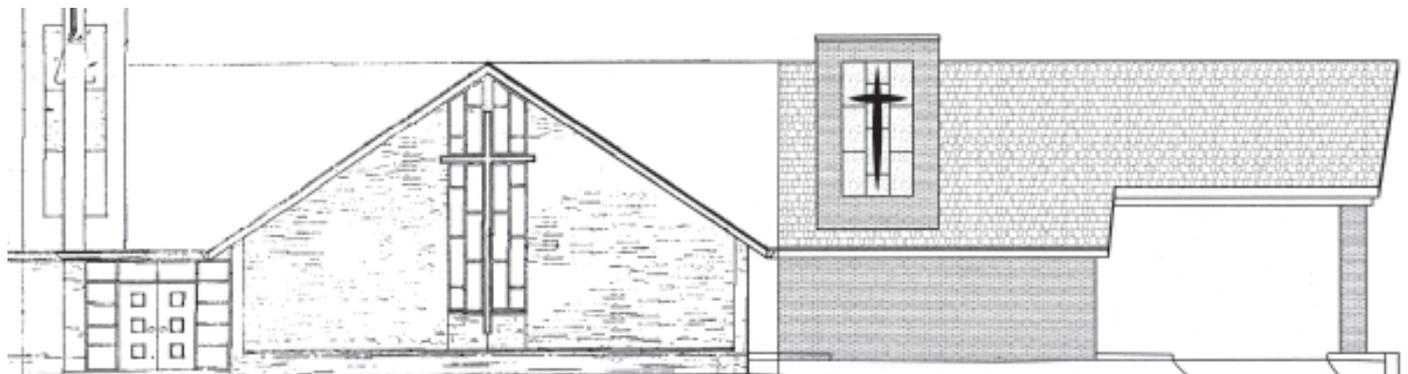
O Give Thanks unto the LORD, for He is Good

BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

Our records of birthdays and anniversaries may not complete. If your information is missing or inaccurate, please accept our apologies and notify the Church Office at 913-849-3344 or email Church Secretary Stacey Elkinton at trinitylutheranblock@gmail.com.

- Nov 1 Christopher England
- Nov 2 Steve Debrick
- Nov 4 Peyton Mitchell
- Nov 5 Sara Prothe
- Nov 6 Jill Druse
- Nov 7 Fritz Meyer
- Nov 8 Erin England
- Nov 8 Leonard Windler
- Nov 9 Greg Windler

- Nov 9 Brad Ashley
- Nov 11 Lana Kettler
- Nov 11 Chylar Jones
- Nov 13 Dennis Ohlmeier
- Nov 13 Doris Rodewald
- Nov 14 Elena Smithhisler
- Nov 15 Frances Minter
- Nov 15 JoAnn Vaughn
- Nov 16 Sacred Davis
- Nov 19 Elaine Bocker
- Nov 19 Kreston Debrick
- Nov 19 Kathy Peckman
- Nov 20 Alexis Belsanti
- Nov 20 Luke Elkinton
- Nov 20 Randy Maisch
- Nov 21 Jim Prothe
- Nov 21 Megan Tesar
- Nov 22 Whitney Shoemaker
- Nov 25 Burl Peckman
- Nov 25 Jason Peterson
- Nov 24 Lindsey Lester



- Nov 25 Carolyn Isenhower
- Nov 25 Courtney Belsanti
- Nov 25 Dana Hall
- Nov 28 Hunter Rush
- Nov 29 Rick Druse
- Nov 30 Alan Hutchison
- Nov 3 Ken & Karla Debrick (32)
- Nov 18 Darrell & Barb Brandt (47)
- Nov 20 Harry & Gay Stubbs (43)
- Nov 22 Brad & Susan Ashley (14)
- Nov 23 Vernon & Donna Prothe (64)
- Nov 29 .. Webb & Virginia Oberheide (33)
- Nov 29 ... Brett & Becky Stutzman (50)

Missionaries of the Month



Each month we remember in prayer in our worship services—and you are encouraged to remember in your personal prayers—specific missionaries around the world who are supported by our congregation through our mission offerings to our Synod.

November 5

Rev. Eric & Johanna Stinnett
Ethiopia

November 12

Rev. Herb & Markie Burch
Belize

November 19

Rev. Roy & Eliza Askins
Hong Kong

November 26

Rev. John & Hannah Loum
Gambia



DVD Study "A Man Named Martin"

Our current study in Adult Bible Class is "A Man Named Martin," using DVD presentations to look at the life, work, and teachings of Martin Luther, and the impact on the world of the Reformation he began when he posted his 95 Theses. Join in Sundays at 9:00am in the Overflow for "A Man Named Martin!"



These are just some of the more than 70 members and friends of Trinity who either attended or performed in the Kansas City area Reformation 500th Anniversary Hymn Festival on October 15. Our Trinity Lutheran Foundation was the main sponsor of this event, giving a generous grant in recognition of our congregation's own 150th Anniversary next year. Two sold-out performances were held at Helzberg Hall in the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, as a special celebration for all LCMS congregations in the greater Kansas City area of this year's 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. Narrated by both the Kansas and Missouri LCMS District Presidents, there was spectacular mass choir of over 350, accompanied by an instrumental ensemble and the mighty Helzberg Hall pipe organ! Participating congregations were from as far away as Manhattan, Kansas and Concordia, Missouri. Thanks to Jim Prothe for the group photo above, and to the Generations group for generously providing the bus.





Could you—individual, family, or group—serve snacks sometime after worship? Two Sundays in November are still open! The sign-up sheet is by the table with the snacks. Thanks to all those providing snacks for Coffee Hour!

November 5
Linda Prothe

November 12
Dena Kaiser

November 19 & 26
Need Volunteers



New Reformation Banner

Our thanks to Terese Vogts for creating the new Reformation banner on display in the Sanctuary, in honor of the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation being observed this year.

New Funeral and Cemetery Guidelines

The Board of Elders approved guidelines for funerals and burials at Trinity that were presented to the Voters Assembly last month. This basically just puts in writing our existing customs and practices.

Included is a Funeral Planning Worksheet to pre-plan certain aspects of your funeral service and burial with respect to Trinity. Pastor Vogts is happy to meet with you about this, or the worksheet can simply be submitted to him for placement in the church records.

The guidelines and worksheet are available in the large literature rack in the overflow, and on the worship page of our web site, www.trinitylcms.org/worship.



Fall Sermon Series

Life Lessons from the Old Testament

We are currently journeying through the pages of the Old Testament in our Fall Sermon Series on *Life Lessons from the Old Testament*, looking at characters from the Old Testament and what lessons we can learn from their lives. *"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope"* (Romans 15:4).

September 24
"Adam: Be Content With What You Have"
Genesis 3:1-4:1

October 1
"Abraham: It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time"
Genesis 16:1-4

October 8
"Jacob: God Will Provide"
Genesis 27:1-36

October 15
"Joseph: Do Not Seek Revenge or Bear a Grudge"
Genesis 50:15-21

October 22
"Moses: I Know the Plans That I Have For You"
Exodus 3:1-15

October 29 (Reformation Sunday)
"Josiah: God's Extreme Renovation"
2 Kings 22-23

November 5
"Joshua: Dare to Be Different"
Joshua 24:15

November 12
"Ruth: He Will Give You Your Heart's Desires"
Ruth 4:13

November 19
"David: Nip Temptation in the Bud"
2 Samuel 11:26-27

November 26
"Job: The Comforting Hope of Everlasting Life"
Job 19:23-27



The new Church Year begins with the First Sunday in Advent on December 3.

This year's Advent-Christmas Sermon Series will be *"And His Name Shall Be Called,"* looking at the various biblical names and titles of the Messiah.

We will have a "Christmas Carol Communion Service" on Sunday, December 17, with favorite carols used for portions of the Liturgy.

The theme for this year's Children's Christmas Program on Christmas Eve, Sunday, December 24 at 7:00pm, will be "From Heaven Above," named after the Christmas hymn by Martin Luther and focusing on the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. Christmas Day service will be Monday, December 25, at 10:00am.



Trunk or Treat

More Pictures Online at www.trinitycms.org/photos

