

FAITH NEWSLETTER

February / March 2016



Dear Friends in Christ,

It seems like Christmas season was just yesterday, and now Lent is just around the corner! Ash Wednesday is on February 10, which begins the season of preparation for Holy Week and our celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This year our Lenten focus will be on the Sermon on the Mount. This is the first of Jesus' teachings in the first Gospel in the New Testament. These words of Jesus shape who we are as His followers and as a community of believers.

In the middle of the sermon, Jesus describes three practices of the Christian life. He warns us not to do these things for show or to get attention, but we should do these things in secret.

Three times Jesus says, "When you..." Jesus says, "When you give to the needy..." (Matthew 6:2) "When you pray..." (Matthew 6:5) and "When you fast..." (Matthew 6:16). As we continue together into Lent, I encourage you to consider Jesus' words about these three practices: giving, prayer, and fasting.

All three of these practices are meant to draw you outside of yourself and connect you more closely to your heavenly Father. There is always a danger that we do them to make ourselves look good. Sin directs us inwards, towards ourselves. Faith points us outside ourselves and to God, our Father.

Giving directs us outside of our own needs to the needs of those around us. Think about who is in need around you, and what you can do to meet those needs.

Prayer directs us to look to God as the only one who can help in our own time of need. We don't just pray for ourselves, but for all those in need around us. Notice how all the pronouns in the Lord's Prayer are plural: our, us, our, us, we, us, us, us (there's no "I," "me," or "mine").

Fasting helps us to see that we are not slaves to our desires and appetites. We don't talk much about fasting as Lutherans, perhaps because the practice was misused at the time of the Reformation. But Jesus expects you to fast ("When you fast..."), just as He expects you to give and He expects you to pray. Fasting is not just giving up sweets for Lent. Fasting is choosing not to indulge your every desire, and living a life of restraint, because you know that all true pleasure comes from God.

That's where we will start this Lent, so come along on Ash Wednesday as we follow Jesus to the cross, dying along with Him, that we may rise with Him to new life.

Have a blessed Lent!

Pastor Birkholz

In and Around Faith Church

Ladies Aid

Our first meeting of 2016 will be on Feb.4th at 6:30 PM in the Parish Hall. All ladies of the church are invited to become members. Please know that you are always welcome to attend our meetings and functions even if you desire not to be a member.

Plans for our rummage sale will be discussed. We will also discuss future projects.

Family Bingo Night

Are you ready for some Bingo?

Come join us February 20th 5:00 – 7:00 PM. Games start promptly at 5:00. Come hungry for the excellent food available from the concession area. There is no charge to play bingo.

If you would like to donate a prize, please speak to Mike Kampenga @ (708) 595-4821.

Bring friends and family and enjoy the fun.

Hymn of the Month (Lent)

"When I Behold Jesus Christ" (# 542)

You expect to find Lutherans in Europe and North America. You probably don't expect to find them in Africa. In fact, with over six million members, one of the largest and fastest growing Lutheran Churches is in Ethiopia. The name of the church body is the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (Place of Jesus) and they have been working with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod for several years now to help train their pastors and seminary professors. Our hymn of the month for Lent comes to us from this Ethiopian Lutheran Church.

This simple and profound hymn tells of the great love of Jesus that led Him to lay down His life for us on the cross, even in the midst of our sinfulness. As we give thanks to God for the sacrifice of His Son, we also give thanks that He has brought us into fellowship with Christians throughout the world, including our brothers and sisters in Christ in Ethiopia.

Faith, Hope and Peace (FHP) Ministries Update

Pastor Birkholz was one of the founders of this ministry and continues to serve on the board of directors. FHP is a volunteer organization working around the suburban area to bring the Word of God to those living in area residential care facilities.

As we begin 2016, we have added 2 new facilities this past year (Lombard Place in Lombard and BRIA in Westmont) to total 16 facilities whose residents receive the message of salvation each week. Currently, over 100 volunteers (pastors, organists, hosts, administrative assistants) from 34 area churches serve our facilities by providing weekly church services to residents.

In 2015 an average of about 250 fellow Christians gathered together each week at facilities which Faith, Hope, and Peace volunteers conduct services to hear our Lord's wonderful news. This past Christmas Eve, 428 people heard the message of Christ's birth!

If you could spare a few hours during the week to play a keyboard, help residents at the services, share your clerical skills, or just help out with a task when needed, please contact Craig Chidester, Executive Director, at 630-710-0396 or cdc33@att.net or speak with Pastor Birkholz. Visit our website at www.fhpministries.org. Your willingness to spread the Word is a wonderful statement of faith. Thanks and may God bless you!

Vacation Bible School 2016

Save the date: VBS will be from June 13-17 this year. Watch for more information in the next newsletter.

Ask the Pastor

If you have a question about a Bible Verse, current issue or a practice of our congregation, please submit it in the box on the information table. Pastor will answer it in the next newsletter.

Special Services at Faith Church

Transfiguration

Sunday, February 7, 9:00 AM

On this last Sunday before Lent, we bid farewell to our alleluias as we follow Jesus down from the mountain and begin the journey to Calvary. Following the service we will (weather permitting) head outside to burn palms to create the ashes for Ash Wednesday. If you have saved your palm cross from last year, we invite you to bring it with you on Transfiguration.

Ash Wednesday

February 10, 7:00 PM

On Ash Wednesday we remember that we are dust and that we will one day return to dust and ashes. The imposition of ashes will be available at the beginning of the service for those who wish to receive them. The ashes are marked in the sign of the cross to point to Jesus who died for us and gives us the promise of everlasting life. We will also receive together the body and blood of Jesus, the same body that rose from the dead, conquering death forever.

Lenten Midweek Services

Wednesday, 7:00 PM

This year's midweek services will focus on Jesus' words to us in the Sermon on the Mount. Come early to spend time in prayer and meditation, and stay as long as you wish to continue to watch and pray for your needs and the needs of the whole world.

Palm Sunday

March 20, 9:00 AM

The Palm Sunday service begins with the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and a procession. We then read together the Passion of Christ from St. Luke, as our hearts turn again to Jesus' suffering and death for us.

Confession and Absolution

Tuesday, March 22, 10:30 AM - 12:00 PM

Wednesday, March 23, 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM

Prepare to celebrate the death and resurrection of our Lord by confessing your sins and hear our Lord's gracious words of forgiveness spoken to you. Everything spoken in confession remains completely confidential.

Maundy Thursday

March 24, 7:00 PM

On the night our Lord was betrayed, He washed His disciples feet, giving them the command (mandate = Maundy) to love one another. He also gave them the gift of His body and blood in the Lord's Supper. Our Maundy Thursday service begins with corporate confession and the sharing of the peace. We conclude with the stripping of the altar as Psalm 22 is sung.

Good Friday

March 25, 3:00 PM & 7:00 PM

The Chief Service is held at 3:00 PM, the hour of our Lord's death. We hear the passion account according to St. John, interspersed with verses from "O Sacred Head Now Wounded."

The Tenebrae (darkness) Service is at 7:00 PM. We sing psalms of lament and the Song of Habakkuk as the lights are lowered and candles are extinguished, recalling the darkness when Jesus died.

Easter Vigil

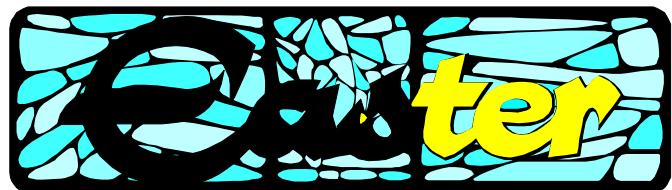
Saturday, March 26, 7:00PM

This is the church's most ancient service. It begins with a fire outside and the lighting of a new paschal candle. We continue into the sanctuary and hear the great stories of salvation from the Old Testament. The resurrection of Jesus is announced, and we join together in celebrating the Lord's Supper.

Easter Sunday

March 27, 9:00 AM

We gather together once more to hear the good news that Jesus is risen, and because He lives, we, too, will rise to live with Him forever.



Faith in Focus

Back in December, members of Faith were invited to participate in an important discussion on the state of our congregation. There's no easy way to summarize a three hour discussion in a few pages, but here are some notes and highlights from that morning.

Why We Met

Pastor Birkholz and the lay leaders of our church have noticed some recent trends:

- Attendance has been down, not just in the summer, but through the fall as well. Our average weekly attendance had grown steadily to a high of 63 in 2014, but dropped significantly to 54 in 2015.
- Weekly giving is rarely enough to meet our budgeted expenses. Account balances have remained stable mainly due to large, one-time donations, such as memorial gifts.
- There seems to be an increased number of interpersonal conflicts within the congregation, and many groups are struggling to maintain and recruit volunteers. There are some exceptions, including the Food Pantry and VBS programs.

Over a third of our confirmed members have joined or been confirmed in the last 10 years. While some of these new members attend church regularly, 75% of these newer members attend church less than half of the time, or not at all. **One of our main goals as a congregation is to re-engage these newer members who are not regularly attending church.**

We don't need to use gimmicks or marketing to draw people into worship. The Holy Spirit works to create and nurture faith through the Word of God. Yet God uses us as His instruments to speak that word to other people. Each member of our congregation should be actively speaking and showing the love of Jesus to those around them.

Worship at the Center

The weekly Divine Service is at the heart of what it means for us to be a Christian congregation. Everything that we do is either preparing for worship or living out our worship. All of our congregational groups and activities should be centered around worship. As an individual Christian, corporate worship is at the center of your life, too.

From God's Word, we learn that worship is joyful, beautiful, reverent, orderly, edifying, unifying, and welcoming to all ages, races, and income levels.

As we discussed worship at Faith, the following comments were made about worship:

It's good when we can take something from the worship service (particularly the sermon) and apply it to everyday life.

The Gospel of Jesus needs to stay in the center, rather than other political or moral topics.

It's helpful when the sermon is educational.

The regular rotation of liturgies provides a good balance of structure and variety.

Silence before the service helps to create an atmosphere of peace and preparation.

It's good to see children involved, particularly as acolytes assisting with the services.

We need to continue to use our hymnal, as it shows where the liturgy and hymns are found in Scripture.

Bible Study



Faith in Focus

Continued

Christian Education

Everyone, not just children, should be involved in the continued study of God's Word. Christian education helps to explain and apply what God does for us in worship.

Here's what people had to say about Christian Education at Faith:

- The children's lessons and activities in Sunday School and VBS should connect to the lectionary (reading in church) and the worship life of the congregation.
- We need to connect with the parents who send their kids to VBS.
- The pastor's involvement with education at all levels is appreciated. Since we have a smaller congregation, the pastor can give individualized attention to the children.
- We need to offer more educational opportunities for youth and young adults.
- Sunday Bible Class should be a priority over other meetings and social activities that might take place after church.
- We should have an "Ask the Pastor" box for those who have specific questions.



Community Service

Because of our faith, we help to care for the physical needs of our neighbors. God serves us first in worship, and then we serve one another.

These are some of the comments made about Community Service at Faith:

- Serving others often leads to evangelism opportunities.
- The nursing home services are a good way to reach out to those in need of hope.
- Serving others can strengthen your own faith as well.
- As we serve the community, this gives us opportunities to talk about Jesus with our friends, too.
- We should go "caroling" in nursing homes at times other than just Christmas.
- Serving others is worth the effort, even if you don't see results.
- We can continue to make our facilities available to outside groups who need space.
- The pastor is a visible reminder of the presence of Jesus in the community.
- We need to continue to be welcoming to all strangers and guests.



Faith in Focus

Continued

Fellowship

The congregation provides opportunities to support and encourage one another, particularly in times of crisis. Fellowship activities are times to strengthen these bonds and get to know each other better.

The following suggestions were made regarding Fellowship at Faith:

- We should better coordinate rides for those who would like to come to church but are unable to drive.
- When the lay leadership works together well, it sets the tone for the rest of the congregation.
- Fellowship activities provide opportunities for different members to get involved with the planning and execution of the events.
- Our new projector would be helpful to use for having movie nights.
- A specific “Fellowship Committee” is not needed, but people should be encouraged to plan and organize events they would like to have at Faith.

We concluded by talking about how we can all reach out to both members of our congregation who have not been active recently, as well as our own circle of family and friends who need to be connected to Christ through worship at Faith.



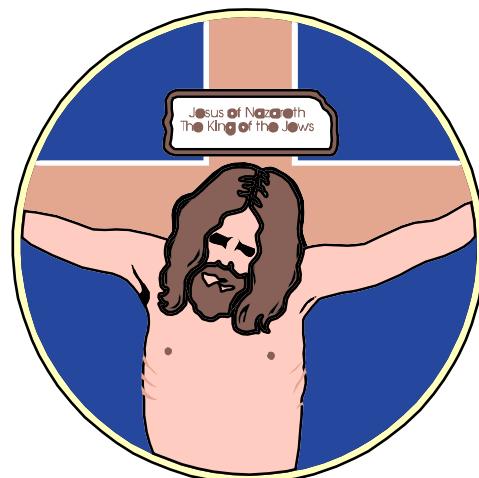
Schedule of February / March 2016 Events

Date	Time	February Event
6	9:00 AM	Food Pantry Distribution
7	9:00 AM	Worship / Communion
	10:15 AM	Sunday School
	10:30 AM	Adult Bible Class
10	7:00 PM	Ash Wednesday Worship / Communion
14	9:00 AM	Worship / Communion
	10:15 AM	Sunday School
	10:30 AM	Adult Bible Class
17	7:00 PM	Lenten Worship
20	9:00 AM	Food Pantry Distribution
21	9:00 AM	Worship / Communion
	10:15 AM	Sunday School
	10:30 AM	Adult Bible Class
24	7:00 PM	Lenten Worship
28	9:00 AM	Worship / Communion
	10:15 AM	Sunday School
	10:30 AM	Adult Bible Class

Weekly Meetings

Bible Study	Fri. - 11:00 AM
Confirmation Class	Fri. - 4:30 PM
AA Groups	Mon-Wed-Fri - 6:00 PM
	Sat. - 8:00 AM
Alanon	Tue. - 7:30 PM

Date	Time	March Event
2	7:00 PM	Lenten Worship
5	9:00 AM	Food Pantry Distribution
6	9:00 AM	Worship / Communion
	10:15 AM	Sunday School
	10:30 AM	Adult Bible Class
9	7:00 PM	Lenten Worship
13	9:00 AM	Worship / Communion
	10:15 AM	Sunday School
	10:30 AM	Adult Bible Class
16	7:00 PM	Lenten Worship
19	9:00 AM	Food Pantry Distribution
20	9:00 AM	Worship / Communion
	10:15 AM	Sunday School
	10:30 AM	Adult Bible Class
24	7:00 PM	Maundy Thursday Worship / Communion
25	3:00 PM	Good Friday Worship
	7:00 PM	Good Friday Worship
26	7:00 PM	Easter Vigil Worship / Communion
27	9:00 AM	Easter Sunday Worship / Communion



Feb. / Mar. 2016 Elders, Ushers & Lay Readers

Feb. Worship 9:00 AM Sunday

Feb. 7	Alden Ketchum Gene Osmanski Mike Kampenga Katie Kampenga
Feb. 14	Frank Oslakovic Ed Neaves Howard Johnson Mark Trojanowski
Feb. 21	Alden Ketchum Richard Clark Marilyn Diehl Eleonore Lang
Feb 28	Alden Letchum Gene Osmanski Ray Bennett Dora Haynes

Midweek Services 7:00 PM

Feb. 10	Ed Neaves Richard Clark Alden Ketchum Gene Osmanski
Feb. 17	Frank Oslakovic Howard Johnson
Feb. 24	Richard Clark Ed Neaves
Mar. 2	Alden Ketchum Mike Kampenga
Mar. 9	Gene Osmanski Howard Johnson
Mar. 16	Ed Neaves Frank Oslakovic

Mar. 24 Maundy Thursday

Gene Osmanski
Richard Clark
Alden Ketchum
Mark Trojanowski

Mar. Worship 9:00 AM Sunday

Mar. 6	Frank Oslakovic Ed Neaves Mary Slepski Gail Henson
Mar. 13	Richard Clark Howard Johnson Mark Trojanowski Mike Kampenga
Mar. 20	Alden Ketchum Gene Osmanski Eric Rosenbrock Ray Bennett
Mar. 27	Richard Clark Ed Neaves Mike Kampenga Katie Kampenga

Mar. 25 Good Friday

3:00 PM	Ed Neaves Richard Clark
7:00 PM	Frank Oslakovic Howard Johnson

Mar. 26 Easter Vigil 7:00 PM

Alden Ketchum
Gene Osmanski
Ray Bennett
Mark Trojanowski

Lay Readers 9:00 AM Sunday

Feb. 7	Gene Osmanski
Feb. 14	Mike Kampenga
Feb. 21	Katie Kampenga
Feb. 28	Ray Bennett
Mar. 6	Ed Neaves
Mar. 13	Debbie Hochgesang
Mar. 20	Mike Kampenga
Mar. 27	Mark Trojanowski