



Friends of Faith

2021 Edition



From the Pastor:

This year has been difficult for all of us, to say the least. Who could have imagined just one year ago that we would be facing life-changing restrictions on everyday activities? Work, school, vacations, holidays, just about every aspect of life was changed or cancelled. Even here at church we had to deal with about 10 weeks without public worship services, including during Holy Week and Easter. Fellowship and educational events were cancelled.

As a pastor, it was difficult to provide spiritual care from a distance. Most in-person visits were replaced with calls, emails, and letters. Even when I was able to visit hospitals and nursing homes, masks and other barriers made it difficult to connect with people. I used video streaming for services, Bible Classes, and prayer vigils. I am very thankful for the technological options available when meeting face-to-face wasn't an option.

In the end, though, our experience going through this challenging situation has made us stronger as a congregation. We have learned to depend more on the Lord and on one another. We have relied on His strength when our own has failed.

As we hope and pray for a return to normalcy this year, we also know that the Lord will bring us through whatever unexpected challenges we will face, and that He has brought us together for such a time as this.



Going, Going, Gone As a fundraiser, Pastor Birkholz grew out both his hair and his beard during the lockdown. Donors were able to make a gift to the Faith General Fund and register their preference for him to shave off either his hair or his beard. The pictures below will show which option prevailed.



Pandemic Reflections

Our experiences at Faith since last March have brought to mind an Easter sermon that I heard at Faith several years ago. For those who might not know, during periods of pastoral vacancies in the past, our elders, led by Gene Osmani and Ed Neaves, conducted services at Faith, and at one of these services, on Easter Sunday, Gene delivered the sermon. Most of the attention in his sermon was of course focused on Christ as our Risen Savior, but a short passage at the beginning of this sermon has stayed with me ever since. In this introduction, Gene pointed out some noteworthy aspects of about the actions of the women going to the tomb. Gene highlighted three things they did that demonstrated their faith, things that we Christians should keep in mind.

First, they were prepared. They had gone to the market ahead of time and had the balms and spices they needed to treat the body of Christ in the tomb. We Christians prepare through the Word and Sacrament, but on a practical level, what a blessing it was that Pastor had the foresight to install the technology needed to live stream our services at Faith! I am sure that Pastor never dreamed he would need that technology to reach his flock in a pandemic, but when that time came, we at Faith were prepared. **Second, they went out.** While other disciples stayed in hiding, cowering in fear, they went out. In the same way, Pastor led us in a new way of prayer and praise as he and other spiritual leaders in our community joined forces for the Thursday vigil services. We all felt such a sense of trepidation and uncertainty at this time, not sure what was going to happen next, but our spiritual leaders and our congregations moved forward with faith in this new, intimidating reality. **Third, they kept going.** As the women walked to the tomb, they asked one another, "Who will roll away the stone from the tomb?" They did not know how they would be able to accomplish their purpose, and they knew there would literally be huge obstacles they would have to overcome, but they kept going. They had faith that when the time came, the Lord would provide a way for them to achieve their goal. In the same way, we at Faith never gave up and continued to stay together as a family of Faith, even in those months when we were physically apart.

We are blessed to have a forward-thinking and compassionate Pastor in all of this. The contributions made by Pastor's family members to all of our efforts at Faith also deserve special mention. It was wonderful to see how Amberleigh, Zachary and Elizabeth stepped up and helped us all by singing, playing music, and serving in so many other ways. We should all be grateful to the entire Birkholz family for their hard work and dedication in this challenging time for us at Faith.

by Debbi Hochgesang

The number of families seeking assistance from Faith's Food Pantry has almost doubled compared to last year. During the pandemic, numerous changes have been made in order to keep our Food Pantry families as well as our volunteers healthy. Families are greeted outside the Parish Hall side door and given a prepackaged grocery bag as opposed to choosing foods from the Pantry. During the summer months, fresh green beans, tomatoes and beets were provided from Faith's garden tended to by Pastor Birkholz. Thanksgiving meals, including turkeys, were provided to 60 community families. Soup jars, assembled by Faith's Sunday School families, will be provided in February.

The Lord continues to bless our little party with Meijer (Evergreen Park) Simply Give partnership, Panera Day-End Dough-Nation program, support from the Village of Oak Lawn including Oak Lawn Community High School, and numerous donations from Faith church members, community organizations and families. Faith Food Pantry and all of its volunteers truly appreciate all that continues to be done to help nourish the less fortunate in our surrounding communities. Involvement in Faith's Food Pantry over the years has not only opened my eyes to the hunger needs in our immediate community but I have also been blessed to share the goodness of the Lord and provide a much-needed touch of compassion and hope for those who share their stories.

By Lynne Trojanowski



Welcome to Faith!

On August 2, we welcomed six new members to our congregation. Mike Krauss (left) works in security. He lives in Justice, where he cares for his mother. Mike comes to Faith as a good friend of Ed Neaves and Ray Bennett. David and Isabella Mhenga and their three sons, Benjamin, Arthur, and Matthew (right) began attending Faith with David's mother, Teddy, who was visiting from Tanzania. David works for Amazon, and Isabella is preparing to be a nurse. They live in Hickory Hills. We give thanks to the Lord for bringing these wonderful people into our fellowship.



In Memoriam...

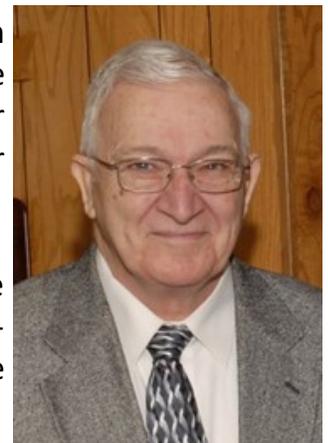
Many of us have lost loved ones in the past year, due to Covid-19 and other illness. Here at Faith in 2020 and early 2021 we have experienced the deaths of three long-time members, and we have also grieved with many other families in our congregation and our community.

Bill Lee and his late wife, Marlis (right), were a fixture in our congregation for decades. They raised their family at Faith, and Bill served for many years as Sunday School Superintendent. Bill was a WWII veteran, and lived out the last few years of his life at the Illinois Veterans' Home in Manteno.



Bob Green (left) had a heart for people, and served in many leadership capacities at Faith, including as an Elder up to the very end. He loved music and artwork, and was devoted to helping out those in need. His greatest love for his Savior, Jesus Christ, and he remained active in worship and Bible Class, despite challenges with his health.

Glen Werth (right) was a true servant, volunteering both in the church and the community. Glen was always helping with projects around the church, and he served as a volunteer firefighter for the City of Hometown. He was married to his dear wife, Lois, for over 65 years.



In our times of grief and sorrow we turn to the Lord in trust and hope. He rose from the dead, breaking the power of sin and death. His resurrection assures us that we, too, will rise with Him and be together with those we love who die in Faith.



Confirmed in Christ

On Sunday, August 23, we celebrated the Rite of Confirmation for Kenilynn Angelea Breitbarth and Sarah Gwen Kampenga. Kenilynn and Sarah have been undergoing instruction for the past two years, completing their last few weeks of via Zoom. Kenilynn's confirmation verse is 1 Corinthians 13:13, "So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Sarah's verse is Joshua 1:9, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened and do not be dismayed, so the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Financial Update:

As we entered the pandemic, I was concerned for the financial stability of the congregation. I expected giving to drop dramatically when services were cancelled or restricted. To my surprise, the result was the opposite. Donations continued and even increased, with both members and nonmembers sending in gifts by mail and electronically. Our "Bald or Beardless" fundraiser was a huge success. The Payment Protection Program allowed us to continue to pay our workers during the shutdown. We were even able to replace the roofs on all three buildings: Church, Parish Hall, and Parsonage (including the garages) due to an insurance payment following a storm. From a financial standpoint, we are in better shape than we have been in several years. Even though our finances have stabilized in the short-term, we have a few major expenses to anticipate in the coming years. The heating systems on our properties are all aging and should be replaced soon, along with the Air Conditioning system at the parsonage. No matter what the future may hold for our congregation, we trust that the Lord will continue to provide for us through the generosity of people like you.

How to support Faith:

- Keep our congregation, particularly our leadership, in your prayers.
- Use Smile.Amazon.com for your Amazon purchases and select Faith as the recipient of the funds your purchases generate.
- If you are a Thrivent member, designate Faith to receive the Thrivent Choice Dollars that your investments generate.
- Visit Faith's Facebook page and click on the blue "donate" button: <https://www.facebook.com/faithoaklawn/>.
- Go to Faith's website and click on the yellow "donate" button: <http://faithoaklawn.org/>
- Remember Faith in your will or estate plan.