

The Churchman

Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church
250 Woodside Road, Riverside, Illinois 60546 * (708) 442-5250
"Faith Active in Love"
www.stspeterandpaulriverside.org

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Issue 2

We are called together by the Holy Spirit around Word and sacraments to glorify God the Father, creator of all things, through our Lord Jesus Christ. We trust God to nurture lives of faith and hope, as we serve and give witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world.

Resolved for 2022: Lean Forward

By Kyle Meier

Perhaps you've seen the meme circulating in social media where 2022 is coming into view, but the person/character in question is still processing the events of 2020. I feel this gap on a profound level. Another year is turning over when so much of my heart and mind are still reeling from the events of the past 22 months.

I'm not ready for 2022, because I've not finished grieving. Due to this pandemic, our congregation not only lost momentum but significant elements of our identity. Like many churches, we are worshipping only one-half to two-thirds of what we were experiencing prior to COVID. Some are still connected online. However, many others are just gone. Essential pieces of our church family disappeared. No goodbye. No email to say their faith had been drifting. Nothing.

Terry Wardle says that ministry is "a series of ungrieved losses." On my worst days, I couldn't grieve because I was still angry. I mentally questioned people's faith, their commitment, and even contemplated quitting altogether. However, eventually the anger seeped out. And when the anger bottomed out, the only thing left was to feel the pain of loss. To admit the fact that these people and Christ's church still mean so much to me. As any pastor knows, when you love something that much, it makes the wins sweeter but the losses even more devastating.

I'm not quite done grieving. I'm not sure we are ever done. However, as a new year approaches, I glimpse hope beginning to well up inside me. Not just a hope for our church but for the Church writ large. When Hope approaches, followers of Jesus are called to lean in.

To lean in, specifically, I'm intentional about the following:

1. Lean into rather than resist the new religious landscape.

A recent poll found that nearly 26 percent of Americans are comfortable living their lives without faith. Another poll found that during the pandemic nearly two thirds of Christians were not actively engaged in church. For pastors and church leaders, these are tough stats to swallow. Faithfulness was precisely the commitment that got you through twenty-two months of empty pews and darkened classrooms. How could people be so quick to toss it aside?

Like a biblical prophet, it's tempting to blame the members of a congregation for a seeming lack of devotion. However, the harder work is allowing the absence to shine a mirror on our current programs and strategies for making disciples. Perhaps the clearest indictment of a consumeristic church is the fallout from the past two

years. When faith without practice can't serve us, we cancel it like an unused gym membership. It's time to take a serious look at whether we inadvertently indoctrinated God's people to expect a service, rather than calling them to be of service to God's world.

Conversely, the pandemic also shined a mirror on the withdrawal in some of our churches. The pandemic revealed how far behind we are. For example, our church did not have online worship prior to COVID. Out of necessity, the events of the past two years forced us to permanently expand our technological infrastructure so that we can reach generations to come.

Like it or not, virtual community is here to stay. The pandemic is stark evidence that all people on earth are connected at the molecular level. Between Facebook, Amazon, TikTok, Netflix and hundreds of streaming video platforms, most people and much of our lives are online. Jesus didn't avoid the spaces and places where people gathered because they were too trendy or profane. No way! The Good News, embodied in his incarnation, expanded to where the community gathered on boats, mountains, and where the outcasts lived!

I've heard many colleagues say how excited they are to get rid of virtual church once things go back to normal. If that's your desire, you still need to plan for making sure your church is actively engaging the post-pandemic global culture of the present age...not the one from 10, 20, 50, or 100 years ago.

2. Lean into the community I have, not the one I used to have.

Admittedly, this stretching is painful. However, I'm leaning into the community that remains, including the new people God brought to our faith community since the crisis began. I've decided to lean into this "new" church where I am pastor, instead of reminiscing about what we used to be. I will never forget those who left. I won't turn them away if they come back. However, acquiring people isn't the mission. Our mission is making disciples for the transformation of the world, rather than maintaining membership for the sake of survival.

This time is ripe for pulling together the remnant community to dream about the future. Dreaming is the behavior many pastors stopped engaging during COVID. Some of us stopped imagining what could be new, and thus we could not cast a vision for the future. To be sure, there was a time to take shelter for survival. Now is the time to assess our potential.

While some of those who left our churches were deeply valuable to the work of the church, others were holding us back. Every faith community includes members who create a codependent relationship with a particular ministry, which fills an emotional void within themselves. While this dynamic offers comfort and control to the

individual, the ministry can be crippled and limited severely by the intensity of their self-interests. Consider the possibility that this crisis offers you the ability to discern God's dreams in a new way with less drama!

3. Lean into the promises that God made at my call.

I am recommitted to leaning into Jesus. One of the greatest temptations in the Christian life, the moment we enter the darkness, is forgetting what God promised us in the light. On several occasions, I admit that my anxiety, fear, and utter confusion got the best of me. It left me clutching and controlling my ministry as if God didn't exist. As if God wouldn't show. As if God didn't see or care. In a word, I forgot.

Think about it... each leader can chronicle countless examples of God showing up for you. Maybe it was a timely email from a church member when you were at the end of your rope, an act of generosity that helped fill a budgetary need, a worship service that sent people forth with passion as disciples, or the unexpected success of an event or program.

Deuteronomy 8 reminds us that one of the most important practices we engage in is to remember who we serve and what God has done. To not forget that if God can do it once, God can do it again.

I remember the day I said yes to God's call, because I wasn't the only one who made a promise that day. I refuse to throw in the towel before seeing God's promises come true for me, for you, for us all.

Kyle Meier is lead pastor at The Peak, a United Methodist Congregation in Apex, North Carolina. He graduated from Duke Divinity School. He enjoys preaching and teaching, and has a great passion for walking alongside people who are willing to ask difficult questions about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Permission has been granted by the Pastor Meier to reprint this article.

Follow Your Treasure

Matthew 6:21, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," can be read as if it says that we should put our treasure where our heart already is. As the faithful, we often operate on this level. So once we get more involved in church, then we increase our pledge. Or if we suddenly, in our heart, become more interested in feeding the poor, then the pocketbook comes out and we give more to ELCA World Hunger.

However, Jesus' teaching on this point is precisely the opposite. Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." So if you keep hoping your heart will be less attracted to material things or drawn deeper into a cause, then you need to start by putting your treasure where you want your heart to eventually wind up. Want to be more committed to your church? Increase your giving. Want to be more involved in advocacy for refugees and immigrants? Then donate time or money to the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. Want to be less worried about your home and less invested in it? Then sell it and buy a less expensive house.

This insight applies at every level, all the way down. It's a guarantee that if we buy a new iPad, our heart will be in that iPad. We protect and value the things we have spent money on. So Jesus invites us to reprioritize by first putting our money where we want our hearts to be.

At the same time, we do well to remember Jesus' warnings against practicing our piety so that others will notice (and he specifically mentions almsgiving). Our heart will follow our treasure, but where we put each is between us and God. On this Ash Wednesday, where is the Spirit prompting you to redirect your treasure so that your heart may begin its Lenten journey?

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River of Grace

by lectionary poet Andrew King

River of God's grace,
where will you touch us this morning?
Through whom, river of grace,
will you pour out today?
May all God's children know
your gift of acceptance.
And may all who seek that strength
taste the fullness of joy.

Dove of the Spirit,
where are you flying this morning?
On whom, Spirit Dove,
will you rest today?
May all God's children know
the peace of your presence.
And may all who bow in prayer
feel the wingbeats of joy.

God who is love,
where will you speak this morning?
In whom, God of love,
will your voice ring today?
May all your children know
their call to be loving.
And may all who respond in faith
share the good news of joy.

Jesus our Lord,
where will you lead us this morning?
As whom, Christ our Lord,
will we leave here today?
May all God's children know
the new life of the river.
And celebrate its blessings
on our way toward joy.

A Prayer of St. Augustine for Epiphany

*O Holy Spirit, Love of God, infuse Thy grace,
and descend plentifully into my heart; enlighten
the dark corners of this neglected dwelling, and
scatter there Thy cheerful beams; dwell in that
soul that longs to be Thy temple; water that
barren soil, overrun with weeds and briars, and
lost for want of cultivating, and make it fruitful
with Thy dew from heaven. Oh come, Thou
refreshment of them that languish and faint.
Come, Thou Star and Guide of them that sail in
the tempestuous sea of the world; Thou only
Haven of the tossed and shipwrecked. Come,
Thou Glory and Crown of the living, and only
Safeguard of the dying. Come, Holy Spirit, in
much mercy, and make me fit to receive Thee.
Amen.*

From the Parish Register

Passages:

Walter E. "Sonny" Kessler, 89 years old, passed from this life on January 15th, 2022. A funeral service for Wally was held at Sts. Peter and Paul on January 20th. Interment was at Evergreen Cemetery in Evergreen Park.

Thanks from the Parsonage

Thank you all for again remembering our family at Christmastime with your many cards and gifts. You are always so kind and thoughtful to think of us in this way at this time of year and it makes for a brighter, warmer Christmas in our home. As always, we cherish your love, support and encouragement throughout our years with you. We pray that the light of Jesus' presence will shine in your lives and guide your steps throughout the coming year.

—Pastor Dennis and Jane

How Worship Practices Form Us for Ministry in Daily Life!

A Life of Faith Initiative Resource

Craig L. Nesson: Wartburg Theological Seminary

Fourth in a series.

Prayers of Intercession: "...let us pray for the church, those in need, and all of creation." The prayers of intercession—which include petitions for the mission of the church; for the well-being of creation; for peace and justice in the world; for the poor, oppressed, sick, bereaved, and lonely; for all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit; for the congregation; for special concerns; and for the those who have died before us—certainly are about drawing all these concerns to the attention of God and asking God's benevolent intervention. As we utter these prayers, in a real sense we are participating in a cry of lament in solidarity with all the needy and suffering ones of this world. At the same time the prayers of the church are for us a mission statement. If we dare to beg God to address these things for which we pray, at the same time by our act of formulating these prayers we declare that these are also the very things to which we are committing our own time and energy as Christian people. For example, if we pray for the hungry or for the healing of Mr. Johnson, we are not just turning these things over to God but are also asking God to align our own energies toward feeding the hungry and offering ministry to Mr. Johnson. The prayers of intercession provide a direct connection between our worship and the service to which we are dedicated in our daily lives. Moreover, as often as we join in praying the intercessions, it is not only we who are doing the praying. In fact as we raise our prayers we are joining our prayers to Christ's own prayers for the life of the world. The Spirit of God joins us to Christ's prayer for all creation.

Passing of the Peace: "The peace of Christ be with you always. And also with you." Passing the peace is one of the most tangible moments in the liturgy for linking a worship practice with a life practice. As Christ gives us his peace, a peace beyond all understanding, we receive this peace from one another at worship and become those who are called to pass this peace on to others beyond the sanctuary into the streets. At worship we learn Christ's way of peace and share this peace with the neighbors God gives us in our spheres of influence throughout the week.



A History of Saint Valentine's Day

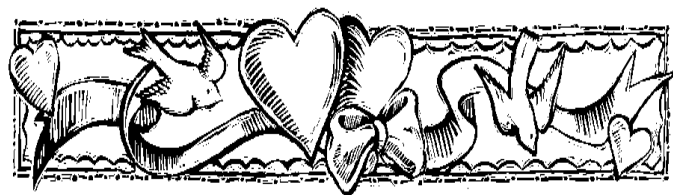
Valentine's Day started in the time of the Roman Empire. In ancient Rome, February 14th was a holiday to honor Juno who was the Queen of the Roman gods and goddesses. The Romans also knew her as the goddess of women and marriage. The following day, February 15th, began the Feast of Lupercalia.

The lives of young boys and girls were strictly separate; however, one of the customs of the young people was name drawing. On the eve of the festival of Lupercalia the names of Roman girls were written on slips of paper and placed into jars. Each young man would draw a girl's name from the jar and would then be partners for the duration of the festival with the girl whom he chose. Sometimes the pairing of the children lasted an entire year, and often they would fall in love and would later marry.

Under the rule of Emperor Claudius II, Rome was involved in many bloody and unpopular campaigns. Claudius the Cruel was having a difficult time getting soldiers to join his military leagues. He believed that the reason was that Roman men did not want to leave their loves or families. As a result, Claudius canceled all marriages and engagements in Rome. The good Saint Valentine was a priest at Rome in the days of Claudius II. He and Saint Marius aided the Christian martyrs and secretly married couples, and for this kind deed Saint Valentine was apprehended and dragged before the Prefect of Rome who condemned him to be beaten to death with clubs and to have his head cut off. He suffered martyrdom on the 14th day of February, about the year A.D. 270.

At that time it was the custom in Rome, a very ancient custom indeed, to celebrate in the month of February the Lupercalia, feasts in honor of a heathen god. On these occasions, amidst a variety of pagan ceremonies, the names of young women were placed in a box, from which they were drawn by the men as chance directed.

The pastors of the early Christian Church in Rome endeavored to do away with the pagan element in these feasts by substituting the names of saints for those of maidens. And as the Lupercalia began about the middle of February, the pastors appear to have chosen Saint Valentine's Day for the celebration of this new feast. So it seems that the custom of young men choosing maidens for valentines, or saints as patrons for the coming year, arose in this way.



DATED MATERIAL

Voices from the Desert: New Year's Resolutions from our Monastic Mothers and Fathers

Compiled by Daniel B. Clendenin

Here are a dozen nuggets of wisdom... gleaned from the "sayings" (Greek, *Apophthegmata*) of the desert monastics...

1. Never stop starting over: "Abba Poeman said regarding Abba Prin that every day he made a new beginning." "My God, do not abandon me. I have done nothing good before Thee, but grant me, in Thy compassion, the power to make a start" (Arsenius, 5th century).

2. Live intentionally, not aimlessly: "Think nothing and do nothing without a purpose directed to God. For to journey without direction is wasted effort" (St. Mark the Ascetic, 5th century).

3. Never, ever despair, no matter what: "Let us eagerly draw near to Christ, and let us not despair of our salvation. For it is a trick of the devil to lead us to despair by reminding us of our past sins" (St. Makarios of Egypt, 5th century). "When someone is defeated after offering stiff resistance, he should not give up in despair. Let him take heart, encouraged by the words... God raises up all who are bowed down" (Psalm 145:14). Do all in your power not to fall, for the strong athlete should not fall. But if you do fall, get up again at once and continue the contest. Even if you fall a thousand times... rise up again each time" (St. John of Karpathos, date unknown).

4. Pray simply, not stupidly: "Often when I have prayed I have asked for what I thought was good, and persisted in my petition, stupidly importuning the will of God, and not leaving it to Him to arrange things as He knows is best for me. But when I have obtained what I asked for, I have been very sorry that I did not ask for the will of God to be done; because the thing turned out not to be as I had thought" (Evagrius the Solitary, 4th century). Abba Macarius said, "It is enough to say, 'Lord, as you will, and as you know, have mercy.' And if the conflict grows fiercer, say: 'Lord, help!'"

5. Renounce all self-justification: According to John the Dwarf, "We have put aside the easy burden, which is self-accusation, and weighed ourselves down with the heavy one, self-justification."

6. Stop judging others: "The monk, says Moses, must never judge his neighbor at all in any way whatever." "They said of Abba Macarius that just as God protects the world, so Abba Macarius would cover the faults he saw, as though he did not see them, and those he heard, as though he did not hear them."

7. Stay put: Mother Syncletica (4th century), "If you find yourself in a monastery do not go to another place, for that will harm you a great deal. Just as the bird who abandons the eggs she

was sitting on prevents them from hatching, so the monk or the nun grows cold and their faith dies when they go from one place to another." "In Scetis a brother went to Moses to ask for advice. He said to him, 'Go and sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.'"

8. Celebrate theological modesty: "St. John Chrysostom says that we do not know wholly even what is given in part, but know only a part of a part" (St. Peter of Damaskos, 12th century).

9. Acknowledge my brokenness: "The person who has come to know the weakness of human nature has gained experience of divine power. Such a person never belittles anyone... He knows that God is like a good and loving physician who heals with individual treatment each of those who are trying to make progress" (St. Maximos the Confessor, 7th century). "A brother said to Abba Theodore, 'Speak a word to me for I am perishing.' Sorrowfully, the old man said: 'I myself am in danger. So what can I say to you?'"

10. Be ruthlessly realistic: "Saint Anthony said to Poemen, 'expect trials and temptations until your last breath.'" "I am convinced that not even the apostles, although filled with the Holy Spirit, were therefore completely free from anxiety... Contrary to the stupid view expressed by some, the advent of grace does not mean the immediate deliverance from anxiety" (St. Makarios of Egypt, 5th century).

11. Always think good of everyone: "Show the greatest gentleness toward all people" (Evagrius the Solitary, 4th century).

12. Read the obituaries: "When the death of Arsenius drew near, the brothers saw him weeping and asked, 'Truly, Father, are you afraid?' 'Indeed,' he answered them, 'the fear which is mine this hour has been with me ever since I became a monk.'" "At the moment of our death we will all know for certain what is the outcome of our life" (St. Gregory of Sinai, 13th century).





Celebrating Vera Borysek's Birthday in December. Photo by Emil Galdun.

February

February 4: Isabelle Boike	February 15: William Londak
Lois Mika	February 19: Gretchen Kostelny
February 6: John Borysek	February 21: Peter Drahos
Zachary Sawyer	Adriana Kubova
February 7: David Richards	Sarah Michaels
Ann Vana	February 22: Robert Kany
February 11: Donovan Byrne	February 23: John Kostelancik
Christopher Greer	February 25: Gary Drahos
February 12: Jack Bute	James Triska
Susan Hassel	February 29: Marie Kamp
February 13: Valerie Smith	

Birthdays and Anniversaries

February 5, 1972: Gary and Jocelyn Drahos
 February 14, 2008: Vincent and Valerie Smith
 February 27, 1965: George and Joyce Hodul

February Announcements

A reminder to the congregation, especially during the months of winter weather, that complimentary cab service is available on Sunday mornings for rides to and from worship services. Please contact Blue Village Cab Company at (708) 583-6900 as early as possible to make arrangements for pick up. When arranging your pick-up, please remind the dispatcher that the ride is to be billed to account number #101755.

If you will be leaving the Chicago area during the winter months for warmer climates, please notify the church office before then so the monthly newsletter can be forwarded to your temporary residence or cancelled until you return. The congregation incurs a fee for each newsletter that is undeliverable; stopped mail delivery to your permanent residence is considered "undeliverable" and returned to the church for a fee. Thank you for your assistance.

Memorials and Honorariums

❖ For the Church ❖

Cynthia Sajid, in memory of grandparents +Anna+ and +Charles Cernak+.
 Luddy Kovalsky, in celebration of Luddy's and her twin brother Jerry's 90th birthday on December 1st.
 Scott L. Michalec, in memory of father +Dr. Edward L. Michalec+. Daniel and Racann Dlhý (*Good Samaritan*).
 The Doeing-Bandura Families, in loving memory of +Anna Bandura+, +Andrew Bandura+, +Cristina Balas+, and +Ann Beckius+.
 Sandy Pianetto, Olga Zavody and family, in loving memory of +Daniel+ and +Susan Panik+, +George+ and +Anna Zavodny+, and +Milan Zavody+.
 Dennis and Diane McGee (*Special Appeal*).
 John and Janet Broussard, on the 94th anniversary of Nick Sasuta's birth.
 Esther Meksto, in celebration of her 91st birthday on January 6th.

Happenings

Congregation Council Meeting
 Thursday, February 17th, 7:30 p.m.

Terry Sullivan Trio Jazz Concert
 Saturday, February 19th, 6:30 p.m.

Memorial Flowers

January 2nd: In memory of +Katherine Predny+ on the anniversary of her birth today.

In memory of +Mildred Predny Kessler+ on the anniversary of her death on January 6th.

January 9th: In memory of dear husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather +Alfred Kovalsky+ on the 9th anniversary of his passing by loving wife Ludmilla and family.

January 16th: In loving memory of beloved mother and grandmother +LaVerne Hanzel+ on the anniversary of her death by loving children Karen Cox, Kevin Hanzel and David Hanzel and their families, loving sister Audrey Bucz and her family, and loving niece Adreienne Gana.

January 23rd: In memory of +Paul Predny+ on the anniversary of his birth on January 20th.

Terry Sullivan Trio
Jazz Concert
Saturday Evening, February 19th, 6:30 p.m.
 \$10 or freewill donation for members.

FEBRUARY WORSHIP SERVERS

February 6th:

Greeters: Paul and Carrie Watkiss
Assisting Minister: Vicki Michaels
Lector: George Valek
Usher: Fred Kuzel

February 13th:

Greeter: Ann Kmet
Assisting Minister: John Broussard
Lector: Fred Kuzel
Usher: Janet Broussard

February 20th:

Greeters: Larry Crachy and Karen Kubik
Assisting Minister: Carrie Watkiss
Lector: Jane Lauritsen
Usher: John Kostelny

February 27th:

Greeters: Philip and Linda Painter
Assisting Minister: Charles Matthies
Lector: Beverly Tarbox
Usher: Walter Cudecki

Sacristan and Altar Care:
Janice Hapgood

MARCH WORSHIP SERVERS

March 2nd: (Ash Wednesday)

Greeter: John and Shirley Kostelny
Assisting Minister: Brandon Michaels
Lector: Carrie Watkiss
Usher: Fred Kuzel

March 6th:

Greeter: Fred Kuzel
Assisting Minister: Vicki Michaels
Lector: Brandon Michaels
Usher: Walter Cudecki

March 13th:

Greeter: Carole Pollitz
Assisting Minister: John Broussard
Lector: J. T. Tarbox
Usher: Janet Broussard

March 20th:

Greeter: John and Shirley Kostelny
Assisting Minister: Carrie Watkiss
Lector: Charles Matthies
Usher: John Kostelny

March 27th:

Greeter: Edward and Joanne Sefara
Assisting Minister: Charles Matthies
Lector: Joanne Sefara
Usher: Edward Sefara

Sacristan and Altar Care:
Ruth Bakalich

News from Riverside Preschool at Sts. Peter and Paul

February is going to be a "sweet" month. We will be busy making crafts, celebrating Valentine's Day, and talking about Presidents' Day.

On our annual pajama day we will be watching a movie and eating popcorn.

—Lisa Manganiello, Preschool Director

Directory Changes

Robert Melnyk
829 Carmen Street
Forney, TX 75126

Thank you!

Thank you to the following individuals and families who purchased poinsettias to decorate the chancel of the sanctuary for our Christmas season services:

Ruth Bakalich, Karyn Bute, John and Shirley Kostelny, Fred Kuzel, Ladies Altar Guild, Charlene Patula, Martin and Ann Pennino, Tina Rothstein and Family, The Slahor and Babyar Families, and The Watkiss Family.

December 2021

Current, Benevolence and Freewill Offering
Budgeted Offering: \$2,500.00

<u>Date</u>	<u>Offering</u>
12/5	\$2,632.00
12/12	\$1,040.00
12/19	\$1,371.00
12/26	\$4,436.00
12/31	\$1,745.00

