



Pastor's



December

The Christian Church is Crumbling! Really?

Zion Lutheran
Church
110 East Grand Avenue

Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock [Peter's confession of the Gospel] I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."
(Matthew 16 - ESV)

I have heard it said, and often thought to myself, "What is happening to the Christian Church in America?" Many congregations are reporting numerical decreases (mainly because people are having fewer children than they did). Some are having inner turmoil. Some are closing their building doors due to the economy. Yet, should the Church be marked by numerical, financial, or any other kind of worldly success? No! Christ says that He will build His Church by the Gospel and that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, even when it doesn't look that way to our fallen reason and senses. Is Christ's Church crumbling to the ground? No, the world is, but not Christ's Church.

First, what is the Church? We use the word 'church' in many ways, don't we? We point to an empty building on the corner and call it _____ Church. Yet, we all know that all buildings, even ones used by Christians for a time, are passing away and are not Christ's Bride, the Church. Strictly speaking, Christ's Church is only the congregation of saints and true believers,¹ as we confess in the Creeds. As to say, an unbeliever is not part of Christ's Church. Since we can't see whether a person has faith, this has often been termed the *invisible church*. However, just because we can't see the Church, meaning believers, that doesn't mean we don't know where to find the Church on earth. As our Lutheran Confessions put it, **"The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered."**² So, we can say that faithful groupings of Christians in beautiful buildings, in a middle school gym, in a home, in a hospital room, in a nursing home, or in a field, are the Church, when the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered as Jesus instituted. Consequently, as our Confessions put it, **"That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake."**³

The Gospel and Sacraments are our food, clothing, and shelter. The Holy Spirit, through these means, creates and sustains the Church, when and where He pleases. As Luther put it, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He forgives daily and richly all sins to me and all believers, and at the last day will raise up me and all the dead, and will give to me and to all believers in Christ everlasting life."⁴

I pray that we, and all congregations of saints, remember that Christ builds His Church, and that built on Him nothing can topple us over—not economy, not numbers, not the government. When Christ's New Testament Church began, she didn't have big numbers, freedom of religion, or nice buildings, but had all she needed—Christ, Her Foundation, in Word and Sacraments. The same was/is true when Christians, to the glory of God, built/build nice buildings, had freedom of religion, and had large numbers--while having their beautiful feet firmly on The Rock.

I am not prophesying that the economy is going to get worse, that the government is going to outlaw Christianity, and that they days of glorious numbers and buildings are over and that we are returning to meeting in secret in house churches with small numbers; I am simply encouraging us to remember that Christ's Church doesn't stand or fall on our numbers, government, or economy. No matter what the economy does, no matter what Satan does; The Church will never taste destruction, since we are built on and by Christ.

On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand,

Pastor

¹ Article VIII of the Augsburg Confession

² <http://www.bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php> (AC VII)

³ Ibid (AC V)

⁴ <http://www.bookofconcord.org/smallcatechism.php#creed>



**HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ALL
THE ACTIVE MEMBERS WHO
HAVE DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS!!**

Joey Sahr
12/1
James Jr. Vance
12/1
Lyn Brace
12/4
James Boettcher
12/5
Dean Hakes
12/7
Brianne Stark
12/7
Justin Taylor
12/12
Verlyn Ehlers
12/13

♥ **HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:** ♥

Louis & Mary Gettler
12/24/1982

† **WE ASK YOU TO REMEMBER IN OUR
PRAYERS THE HOMEBOUND MEMBERS:**

Jan Rothbauer
Mavis Berry
Emma Bollom
Loretta Erick



PRAYER REQUEST

If you would like a prayer on Sunday morning, please contact the secretary during the week. If it is last minute, you can also catch pastor before

MISS A BIBLE CLASS OR SERMON?

Audio of the most recent Bible classes and sermons are on our website. Click the "Education" tab for Bible class or the tab for

CD'S OF SERMONS & BIBLE STUDIES

CD's of Sermons and Bible Studies will be made available for those who request them. Contact Brian Schweisthal with any requests. Brian's cell phone is 715-529-8342 and

RADIO & FLOWERS:

If you would like to furnish altar flowers or sponsor a radio broadcast for a special occasion please call the office. **Altar flowers** are **\$30.00** at Gordys if **you pick up** yourself or **\$40.00** if you would like them **delivered** to the church. You also may bring your own flowers. There is a flower chart in the church on the left of the door as you enter from the education wing. Sign your name by the date you would like to furnish flowers. **The radio broadcast is \$76.00.** Call the office if you would like to furnish a

THE LUTHERAN WITNESS

The Lutheran Witness can be ordered now for 2013. The cost is \$21.65 for a year. Please let the office know by December 18th if you would like to order a subscription.

MEALS FOR MEMBERS:

Brianne Stark will be organizing a list of people interested in providing meals for members in times of need, such as after surgeries, in times of illness, etc. If you sign up, you have no obligation to provide meals at any certain time. You will have the opportunity to participate in cooking/providing meals at times when you are able and it is convenient to your personal schedule. If you want to cook but are unable to drive to drop meals off, please still sign up! We will arrange for someone to pick up the meal from you to drop off at the person/families residence. Please talk to Brianne if you are interested in being on the

THANK YOU!

Thank you so very much for the beautiful, wonderful baby shower last Sunday. It was so much fun and we want to thank everyone for the generous and thoughtful gifts. We are so blessed to be here at Zion with such a supportive, thoughtful congregation. Pastor,

A MESSAGE FROM THE FELLOWSHIP BOARD

The Fellowship Board will be hosting the potluck Christmas brunch following the children's Christmas program. The date is Sunday, December 23rd. The Children's program is at 9:00 a.m. Suggested items to bring for the potluck include egg bakes, baked goods such as coffee cakes, muffins, sweet rolls or donuts, Christmas cookies, and fruit. We hope you will be able to join us for this festive holiday fellowship opportunity. Extended

Red State – Blue State . . . Love it or Leave it?

http://acelc.net/page/acelc_blog (November 13, 2012)

With all that red and blue dividing our one “indivisible” nation under God, I got to thinking about our good ole’ Missouri Synod.

In a recent discussion of a column by Pastor Joshua Scheer (cf. Continued Conversations over at the Brothers of St. John the Steadfast website), Rev. Paul McCain of CPH makes an excellent point. After acknowledging that we most certainly are eager to “patiently, lovingly and gently” teach those with genuine questions about issues like the ordination of women, Rev. McCain says . . .

“When people come openly advocating the ordination of women and advocating for the Church to change its position on homosexuality, as have Carol Schmidt and Matthew Becker, this is no longer a matter of sincere asking of questions to seek understanding, but advocacy of teaching contrary to the Word of God.”

He then cited a most excellent account from Herman Sasse relating Pope John’s harsh refusal to receive a vocal supporter of women’s ordination within the Roman fold. Sasse observes that “Every pastor knows, or should know, that there are cases, when a discussion is impossible and the only answer to a question can be that ‘Be gone, Satan!’ which Jesus spoke not only to the devil (Matthew 4.10), but also to his faithful confessor, Simon Peter (Matthew 16.23).”

Yes, every pastor should know this, but it is difficult knowledge to come by . . . to determine when a person is weak and needs patience or when a person is persistent, unrepentant, and needs to be shown the door. Hard, hard pastoral decisions, these!

In the ACELC, we do not pretend that correction of error will be fast or easy. At the same time, when dealing with the wolf, we need to act decisively in order to protect the sheep. We need to speak as unequivocally as LCMS Pres. Matt Harrison spoke to congress in behalf of the unborn and our refusal to waiver on that issue!

Where is the forceful, sure confession against the errors which have encroached upon the sheepfolds of this Synod?

The ACELC has identified in its Fraternal Admonition and in its Evidence of Errors documents ten cases of leaven currently leavening the lump that is the LCMS. We have followed the procedure of bringing our concerns and objections to the Synod’s President and the Council of Presidents, to our seminaries and to both the CTCR and CCM. Still, the errors remain.

Every pastor knows how hard it is to deal with sin in the parish. He worries about moving too fast, about not being patient enough. He second-guesses himself and loses hours of sleep in prayer or just plain gut-wrenching terrors of conscience. Did he do or say enough? Did he act in love? Was he wrong at some point?

We get it, believe me!

We also get how one sin left unchecked can easily lead to others. St. Paul warned, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump,” I Cor. 5:3. Sinners know how to find permission – not in God’s Word – but in the actions of others! “Well, THEY did it – or HE did it – or SHE did it . . . Why shouldn’t I?”

I’m sure Synodical officials are aware of this and have the same struggles parish pastors have. How to know when you’re dealing with a wolf or just a wayward, wandering, weak and confused sheep? No one thinks it’s easy.

However, aren’t there SOME things we ought to get? Rev. McCain seems to think so. So do others. Maybe they are spread over the Synod in much the way that red is spread across the map of our nation in the image above. I know that we feel as helpless as the red states did in the recent election! Such a narrow margin . . . and who knows how many unborn will never see the light of day because of it!

As a nation, we submit to the rule of law. We pray for our president and participate in the process in order to effect a change, especially to protect the powerless and the disenfranchised. We even have a Synodical president who speaks up for them!

Who speaks up for the sheep being tempted by the ways of this world, watching as pastors lead their congregations to conform to worldly tastes and preferences in order to grow? Who takes as firm a stand against the errors of our Synod as we have seen and heard taken against threats to the lives of unborn children? Who speaks firmly against open communion and the ways in which pastors are deposed and then neglected? Who will stare down even the heads of state and synods in support of what we say we believe, teach and confess – but which we are denying in the ways we put laity into service as if they were ordained? Who will pound a resolute fist before proponents of women’s ordination and actually exercise the ecclesiastical supervision they have been given?

It may simply be left to pastors in the parish, because, despite what Rev. McCain says above, we DO tolerate the likes of unrepentant terrorists like Carol Schmidt and Matthew Becker. They continue to be communed at our altars and we are in fellowship with them!

According to Opinion 11-2610 of the Commission on Constitutional Matters re. LCMS Self-Understanding of Fellowship, it is the self-understanding of the LCMS that all of its pastors and parishes are in fellowship with one another. Accordingly, we must either accept the likes of Carol Schmidt and Matthew Becker and commune with them, or depart the Synod.

Synod . . . love it or leave it! Synod . . . where red states and blue states have to get along. Synod . . . where we just need to learn to lean across the aisle and compromise a little . . . on open communion, contemporary worship, lay ministers, living situations outside of marriage, homosexuality and women’s ordination! Let’s all just get along!

That is the state of our dis-union which every pastor must now address when serving at the Lord’s Table. Visitors may be Missouri Synod. They may also be open and unrepentant proponents of “teaching contrary to the Word of God”! They may be living together outside of marriage, though regularly communed by their pastor, who knows of their living arrangement. They may be actively homosexual and still be members in good standing at an LCMS congregation. They may be actively working to promote women’s ordination and open communion, with the blessing of their pastor, congregation and District President. The Synod says . . . Commune them!

Um . . . I’m with Sasse on this one. Every pastor knows better, or should!

Every pastor in the parish knows that when members rebel against God’s Word, he is not obliged to admit them to the Table and commune them to their judgment. Neither is he required to put membership in a Synodical congregation over faithfulness to protect the innocent from brazen and open rebellion against God. He is a shepherd.

It won’t be easy for him to be that in our Synod today, but he must be, as Pastor Jim Gier touched on in his reply, some comments below Rev. McCain’s. Pastor Gier asked: “So when does the Synod say ‘Be gone, Satan’ to Carol Schmidt and Rev. Matthew Becker? Where does church discipline take place in the Koinonia Project? Are we to continue to commune with (should occasions arise) such false teachers and advocates until, if and when Synod takes action?”

The Synod and its commissions may say “Synod Uber Alles,” so leave the unrepentant among us; commune them with the faithful. Not so the parish pastor. He knows better, or should. If he doesn’t, he is no shepherd . . . and every faithful one will lie awake at night wondering if he has been! No, this ain’t easy at all, and it will only get harder.

Pastor Rick Sawyer + Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School + Flowood, MS

COMMUNITY DAY FUNDRAISER

Thanks to all who participated in the Younkers Community Day Fundraiser for the youth group. \$740 was raised plus we will be receiving a small percentage of the cash register sales at a later date.



New Choir Members Needed! If you are interested in joining the choir

please speak with Lew Drees

ADVENT

Advent begins Sunday, Dec. 2nd. "Advent" simply means "coming." During this penitential season we focus on the 3 "comings" of Jesus for us sinners: 1. His Advent at Christmas, or incarnation. 2. His coming in Word and Sacraments. 3. His coming on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead. In addition to Sunday worship, we will also have midweek Wednesday services at 6:30 p.m. During Advent and Lent the church historically has focused on studying the catechism. Therefore, our Wednesday sermons will be drawn from Luther's Small Catechism.

Advent Wednesday Preaching Series

As you know the Church is out of step with the secular world. One example of this is that we have a different calendar with different holy days. As we begin again the New Year with Advent on December 2, we also begin our midweek sermon series on, "God's Messengers." This is based on the first article of The Creed, "I believe that God has made me and all creatures;.. God made messengers: Angels and Prophets.

Advent and Christmas Worship Schedule:

- Wednesday Vespers 6:30 p.m. Schedule:
- 12/5 - "God's Messengers" - "The Angel Gabriel"
- 12/12 - "God's Messengers" - "The Prophet Malachi"
- 12/19 - "God's Messengers" - "The Angel of the Lord speaks to Joseph."
- Advent 4/Christmas Service: Sunday, Dec. 23rd at 9:00 a.m. Brunch at 10:30 a.m. Corporate Confession and Communion Service followed by the Children's Program
- Christmas Eve Candlelight Service: Dec. 24, 6:30 p.m.
- Christmas Day Service with HC: Dec. 25, 9:00 a.m.
- Christmas 1/New Year's Worship with HC: Dec. 30, 9:00 a.m.

ZION'S WOMEN'S SOCIETY NEWS

The Women's Society met at 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, November 8th. Ten members and Pastor were present. Joann Ehlers was hostess and served cake and ice cream. Pastor led us in devotions based on Martin Luther's Preface to the Small Catechism.

During the business meeting it was decided that we would donate \$100.00 to the Salvation Army for Christmas and also \$100.00 to the Seminary students. We will also be filling cookie tins to give to our congregation shut-ins. Members are to bring two dozen cookies, \$5.00 to go towards the Salvation Army donation and items for the Food Pantry to the December Meeting.

We are to meet at 11:30 a.m. at church on Thursday, December 13th. The cookie tins will be filled prior to our Christmas Potluck Luncheon. Although it wasn't discussed at our meeting we will be trimming the tree and decorating the church for Christmas that afternoon also. Members of the congregation, including the men, are

2013 Ballot of Officers and Boards

Elected (E) Serving (S) /Appointed (A)

President: Tony Welke (E)

Vice President: Greg Leland (E)

Congregational Sec.: Mandy Schoelzel (A)

Elders: Herman Sahr (E), Gerald Hoepfner (S), Jerry Clark (A), Tom Bowe (E)

Trustees: Ed Heidtke (E), Scott Ziebarth (S), Steve Taylor (A), Jim Walton (A)

Evangelism: Sharon Sahr (S), Doreen Szedlak (A), Arlene Potts (A), Marilyn Brace (A)

Education: Pam Rose (E), Amanda Ziebarth (S), Lynn Amundson (A)

Fellowship: Cookie Ziebarth (E), Ann Verch (A), Carol Evenson (E), Lois Eichinger (A), Jan Blair (E), Rosa Blake (A)

Stewardship: Sarah Bowe Tis the Season - for Repenting! ichts (E)

Trust Fund: All appointe

r Karl Rose, Sharon Sahr,

Greg Leland

www.acelc.net

Repentance is something the Lord means to be ongoing in the life of the Christian. But, repentance isn't easy. Who wants to repent? Oh, we repent after eating too much at our Thanksgiving feasts, but that's just our discomfort speaking. As soon as the pressure on the waist band subsides, we're right back at it; left-over heaven!

Genuine repentance is different from wanting to be rid of discomfort so that we can get back to what put us in the discomfort in the first place. Repentance is a gift from above. The Lord gives it in His Word, specifically, His Law – which reveals our love of sin and our hatred of God. It's not very flattering to hear, is it? Maybe that's why we have such a hard time with seasons like Advent or the Sundays leading up to it. All eyes are on the big shebang of Dec. 25! Who wants to repent? Who wants to die?

We *did* die, however! That's the Gospel! We died in Christ, Who took our sins and suffered all they deserve! We died in Baptism and were raised in Christ, as He was. We still die – to sin and self and all evil – daily; and we daily emerge to arise and live before God in Christ and for our neighbor in love. We must even still go into the grave.

How shall we die this Advent season? How shall we die as individuals and as congregations of this Synod? Not by our strategies to self-preserve or self-indulge our desperate need to stave off that awful thing called death! It won't be by forgetting who we are and trying to conform or adapt to the patterns of this world.

We have tried to swallow almost every trend that's come along! Can't you feel the pressure on the waistline? We've thrown open wide the gates – not so the King of Glory may come in – but so that something else may roam about!

Faithful pastors are dismissed unjustly from their calls. Many are neglected on CRM. District Presidents do not discipline wayward congregations. Unfaithful pastors have Carte Blanche, as long as what they're doing "works." Lay ministers make financial sense, and people like it. Women increasingly assist in worship and some urge women's ordination. Open Communion is practiced, and very few want to say something or do anything about this. We are too afraid that it may kill us.

So, we tell ourselves that LCMS congregations which look less and less Lutheran are doing well because they are busting at the seams. We tell ourselves that pastors who are eager to consume the latest trend and fashion in order to capitalize on whatever this moth-ridden world is willing to flutter about aren't doing our congregations any harm. Those same congregations learn many things – whatever the latest author, guru or transformational business is pushing – but they do not know the Catechism, Small or Large. They spend no time in the Confessions. They reflect what it means to be part of a fallen world, but reflect little of what it means to be faithfully Lutheran.

It's time for Advent, people! 'Tis the season to repent! That means the whole life of the Christian is one of dying to self . . . and Synod . . . and all the ways we'd like to shine and glitter before the eyes of a world that just wants to be soothed with visions of sugar plums.

We must learn to live instead from the cross!

No one wants that. It means death! It means admitting that we have let go of trusting Christ's work through the Word and Sacraments. It means facing the fact that we are in fellowship together, but we are not walking together, and to the degree that we have let error enter and remain, we are in fellowship with error!

Must we admit that? Yes! Even if that brings a cross? Even if it means death? Yes! Who are we, anyway? What is the Missouri Synod? Nothing, if She and we are not dying and then rising again.

If you would like some help in dying to the mistaken notion that our Synod is not in need of repentance, please consider our ACELC website, with documents and studies and Overtures which address our errors. Yes, OUR errors! We are all in this together. Please don't be afraid to face that truth, ugly as it is. For in dying – to sin and self and all evil delusions and desires to self-preserve, we arise to live before God in Christ Jesus!

Merry Advent repenting to us all!

**Your Servants For Christ Sake,
Rev. Rick Sawyer
Co-Chairman, ACELC Board of Directors**