



The Grapevine

A Monthly Newsletter For The Family And Friends
Of Faith Lutheran Church Of Sonoma Valley

Volume 3, January 2010—Epiphany Issue

A PICTURE IS WORTH 1000 WORDS...

The Christmas holidays are like a gourmet meal: the rehearsals, the decorating, the planning, the recruiting, the training, the anticipation, and then...the music that captures mind and heart, the message that stirs the depths within, the candlelight of Christmas past, the hope of things to come, the words and deeds of love, the warmth of family and friends, and then...Hurry with that tree! The garbage truck is coming....

Even as I offer you these words, the Chrismon trees and the poinsettia displays are being removed from the Sanctuary of Faith's worship space and our surroundings take on a more predictable appearance.



But the Christ, whose birth and baptism we have just experienced, is not so easily dispensed. The trappings are gone, but He has left His mark. Far more than dried out trees and greens headed for the garbage dump, our sin that places us at center stage, our sin that removes the God of creation to the sidelines, our sin that covers greed, pride, lust and hate with the icing of half-hearted worship and praise...**these are the things that are headed to the trash.**

For the Christ of Christmas has made his mark...a sign of the cross. He has pierced our pride, frustrated our worldly ambitions, humbled us and brought us low so that we could all be built up once again in His forgiveness and love. The "New Year" is a concept rooted in myth. **There really is no such thing as a new year.** Our life is a seemingly endless series of days. Number them as you will, it is not the new year that brings hope and promise. **Each and every day contains the seed of hope and promise because of Jesus.**

Each morning brings the promise of the presence of Christ and His gift of grace. Each day begun with the sign of the cross and the truth, "I am a Baptized child of God," sets the stage for a new outlook. As the darkness of each evening settles in upon us, faith clings to the promise, "I am with you always, even to the end of the day."

Today, I am a child of God. **Today**, in the rhythm and routine of ordinary life, Christ stands with me. **Today** I will sin, and guilt will creep into my thoughts. **Today** Christ will rescue me with the knowledge of all He has done for me. **Today** is Christmas, for Christ has been born within. **Today** is Easter, for I live in the promise of Christ's resurrection. Yesterday is a word for something that is forever past, tomorrow is a word for something that will never exist. **Today** is the only reality that is. **Today** I am a Baptized child of God and will live in his love. **T-O-D-A-Y!**

Sincerely,

Pastor Tom
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FAITH'S SEMINARIAN As you may recall, our 2009 budget (and our new 2010 budget) allocated a portion of funds to assist a seminary student preparing for ministry. Joseph John Barlau is our new seminarian. We recently received a warm letter from Joseph thanking us for our support and relating his experiences and feelings as a first year seminarian. Be sure to visit the Connections Board in Goehring Hall, and read his letter in its entirety. Please keep Joseph and other seminary students in your prayers. You might want to contact him with good wishes at 801 N. Seminary Place, #11, St. Louis, MO 63105.

YOU SAID IT WOULD HAPPEN, AND IT DID! A new series of Sunday morning adult Bible class studies convenes in Goehring Hall at 8:30 AM with Pastor Tom to concentrate on the many prophecies contained in the Old Testament and their specific fulfillment in the New Testament. It makes for interesting and lively study. We commend it to all of our readers. The New Year is a time to avoid empty "resolutions;" instead, make "solid spiritual intentions." You might try getting up just a bit earlier on Sunday mornings and joining our delightful Bible class community as we undertake this new study.

IT'S 2010! OUR ENDOWMENT FUND BEGINS Many months ago the members of our General Assembly voted to establish an endowment fund. A committee was formed to do the groundwork and planning with guidance from Brian Hyde who is the Planned Giving Counselor with the California-Nevada-Hawaii District. He helped us define, design, and map a plan to begin our endowment fund. Initial meetings focused on the benefits of an endowment fund. Next came several discussions on using the funds, creating by-laws, and defining committee guidelines and duties.

Now it's time to share the fruits of our labors with our members. **With Brian's help, two seminars are planned to fully explain what the endowment fund has to offer Faith Lutheran Church.** The first is scheduled for **Sunday, January 10th**. A delightful luncheon will be prepared and served in Goehring Hall. Immediately following, the first of our endowment meetings will take place.

For those who cannot be in attendance, a second endowment fund seminar will occur on **Thursday evening, January 14th at 6:30 PM in Goehring Hall.**

Copies of the endowment by-laws will be distributed to all members. General Assembly members will have an opportunity to approve the by-laws at the first meeting in 2010.

THURSDAY EVENING BIBLE CLASS COMMUNITY RESUMES The plot thickens. Already resistance, even hatred against Jesus begins to grow. We can see it there before us. The narrative in the **Gospel of John** begins to point us to the tragedy of Holy Week and Good Friday and the ultimate majesty and glory of Easter. If you've not yet been part of our Thursday evening Bible class community, the beginning of 2010 is a great time to start! Our study resumes on **Thursday, January 21st at 6:30 PM** in Goehring Hall with Pastor Tom. Mark your calendars, and please plan to be with us then.

SUNDAY COFFEE FELLOWSHIP PLANS FOR 2010

Our new Social Ministry Committee, chaired by Anna Dohse, projects the following plans for our popular Sunday morning coffee fellowship experience to encourage as many people within the congregation to sign up to host coffee fellowships. Without overwhelming our members with too many opportunities, the following schedule is planned:



FIRST AND SECOND SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH:

Member families are invited to sign up.

THIRD SUNDAY OF THE MONTH:

A Board or Committee of the congregation to host.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF THE MONTH:

Social Ministry will host in celebration of ALL birthdays within that month.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF THE MONTH:

If a 5th Sunday occurs, member families will be invited to sign up.

RECYCLING GUIDELINES It is most important to inform users of our facilities, especially the kitchen, of those items which are acceptable and those which are unacceptable as recyclable. We have a separate container, with a recycle symbol on its side, in the kitchen area. Please use this **ONLY** for items which can be put in the blue recycle bin. When in doubt, refer to the poster on the kitchen bulletin board containing the 2010 recycle guidelines. **We encourage all** who use our facilities for various events to refer to the guide, and **recycle as much as possible**. As in the past, our office staff will continue to separate recyclable paper products from non-recyclable items. Thank you for your continued support of this most important responsibility to our planet.

CONTEMPLATE THE FOLLOWING AS WE BEGIN 2010 (author unknown). . . .

You shall not worry, for worry is the most unproductive of human activities. You shall not be fearful, for most of the things we fear never come to pass. You shall not carry grudges, for they are the heaviest of all life's burdens.

You shall not take problems to bed with you, for they make very poor bedfellows. You shall not borrow other people's problems. They can better care for them than you.

You shall not try to relive yesterday for good or ill, it is forever gone. You shall not become bogged down by frustration, for 90% of it is rooted in self-pity and will only interfere with positive action.

Concentrate on what is happening in your life and be happy now.

You shall be a good listener, for only when you listen do you hear ideas different from your own.

You shall face each problem as it comes. You can only handle one at a time anyway.

You shall count your blessings, never overlooking the small ones, for a lot of small blessings add up to a big one.



GRIEVING A SIGNIFICANT LOSS The following article is reproduced from a recent issue of the Lutheran Witness. It occurs in a “Question and Answer” section entitled, “Family Counselor.” I thought it would be useful to share it with our readers of the Epiphany Grapevine Issue...

Pastor Tom

Q. I lost my spouse three years ago, the week after Thanksgiving. Since then, this time of year has felt empty to me. Friends have told me it's time I get over this, but I just can't. What can you suggest that might make this time less melancholy?

A. The death of a spouse is a huge loss. Because we are created in God's image and made for relationship with Him and one another, separation by death affects us greatly. The bond with a spouse runs deep and the grieving process can take a long, long time. While the passage of time may lessen the pain, its impact will be with you for many years.

There are steps in the grieving process, and they often run a more circular course than a linear one. After the initial shock, which can take days to weeks, people will usually find some semblance of moving ahead with life. The feeling of sadness during this time is much sharper on some days than others. Folks often describe an eventual return of more bearable days than overwhelming ones, but it happens little by little. The ache of loneliness and grief are frequently more intense during significant times of the year such as birthdays, anniversaries, Christmastime, and the date of a person's death. Because these days hold so many memories, both good and bad, our sadness is especially painful. Please know that feeling “empty” during such times is normal, understandable, and to be expected, even for Christians.

While others may mean well in wanting you to “get over it,” their words can hurt and leave you feeling even emptier. One of the most helpful ways to walk this journey of grief is to be with others who can respect your feelings, offer compassion, and honor the memory of your spouse. I would also recommend that you contact a grief-support group where you can gather with others who know what a loss feels like. One such group is Grief Share (www/griefshare.org), a nationwide resource that offers a Christian perspective on grief and loss.

As Christians, we can take comfort in Jesus Christ whose death and resurrection opens to us the way of everlasting life, and we look forward to the time when God promises to wipe away tears and “there will be no more death or mourning, or crying, or pain” (Rev. 21:4)

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