

THE GIFT

**A CHRISTIAN PUBLICATION
OF ST. JOHN LUTHERAN**

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WHAT IS A CHURCH?

This is one of the questions I ask my confirmation students, and surprisingly, it seems to be one of the harder questions to answer, perhaps because the answer I give them does not always seem to square with what they have witnessed in the world.

Is a church a building? 4 walls, 2 doors, maybe some classrooms, a basement and a steeple... Certainly we call this building a church, but is this what a church is, and if so, what is so special about this collection of timber, nails and paint?

Is a church a social club? When I was in college in Arizona, one of my friends complained that “for most people, the church is just a club.” I don’t know exactly how true that is, but it certainly seems like my friend might have a point.

It seems that for many congregations – churches have become the center of a culture, or a lifestyle, or a club. Of course this does not apply to everyone, but when one seriously examines the way a modern church operates, it is hard to deny it has some club-like features. Many churches worry a lot about the membership roster, and who is on, or off of it, but many fewer pay as much attention to discipleship. In many congregations, giving is thought of not as a part of the Christian stewardship of creation, but as a test of membership and support of the congregation’s operating budget - more like paying dues than first fruits giving. A frightening number of churches turn inwards and focus all of their waning energy on fellowship activities and quelling any sort of disagreement, rather than having an impact on the world around them.

Is a church a worshiping community? A group of people who gather regularly, usually once a week, around word and sacrament, offering prayer and praise to the risen Lord? Many people would argue that it is, and while I would not disagree that a worshiping community is a part of a church, it cannot be all that a church is, either.

In some ways, all of these things are (perhaps crass) expressions of what many churches have become. That is, empty buildings, where once a week a few folks gather to sing and hear a sermon, and then to hang out and chat and gossip with their friends about things that won’t offend anyone. It’s no wonder kids have a hard time remembering what it is a church is supposed to be, and perhaps there should be no wonder why it is hard to keep kids in church after confirmation. A church is supposed to be, and can be, so much more.

A church is supposed to be the physical body of Christ on Earth, carrying out both the mission and the ministry of Jesus Christ, striving to make this world the very kingdom of God. It is supposed to be a place where people come to worship and offer praise, hear the announcement of forgiveness, and then as a result of that experience, go out into the world, changed and empowered. The church is supposed to be the place, and the people, to whom others can come to receive justice and healing. The church is to be the people who will deal fairly with the stranger and the foreigner, to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to speak justice and comfort for the oppressed. The church is supposed to be the people of God both gathered and sent to make this world delightful, not just for ourselves, but for everyone and for future generations. THAT is certainly a tall order, and a challenge – but it is also exciting, and I would argue well within our reach. THAT is something that not only our children, but adults, too, would be excited to be a part of.

Why do we settle for less?

Yours in Christ – Pastor Andersen

SPECIAL NEEDS RETIREMENT FUND

Many people believe that the ELCA provides financial support for pastors, diaconal ministers, and other church employees who have retired after many years of service. While some denominations do provide support for their retired servants, the ELCA does not. While most retired pastors do receive a pension, for an unacceptably large number of them, their pensions do not adequately provide for their retirement needs. This is because many pastors faithfully served, for many years, in small churches that could not, or would not, compensate them properly, which led to insufficient contributions being made to pension plans.

It is wholly unacceptable that any organization, much less a church, would allow a person who has given 30, 40, 50 or more years of service to spend retirement collecting food stamps, living in abject poverty, and wondering which bills they can pay this month. And yet this is exactly the situation too many pastors find themselves in after retirement.

In order to try and remedy this embarrassing situation, the ELCA Board of Pensions and the ELCA foundation have created the "Special Needs Retirement Fund." The fund exists in order to provide financial assistance to those who so desperately need it. But in order to meet both present and future needs, additional gifts from individuals and congregations are necessary.

In order to try to do our part to help make sure that the Special Needs Retirement Fund can continue to help retired church workers, St. John Evangelical Lutheran is taking a special collection. If you would like to help, and I hope that you do, you are encouraged to use one of the blank "undesignated" envelopes from the back of your box of envelopes, and if you don't have an undesignated envelope in your box, any plain old envelope will do. Just mark "Special Needs Retirement Fund" on the envelope, put your offering in it, and drop it into the collection plate along with your regular offering. The church will collect the offerings and send out a single check for whatever total amount is collected.

SAY A PRAYER, SEND A NOTE...

Jim & Carol Krohmer will be away for about 8 weeks while Jim is undergoing radiation treatments. They would love to hear from you!

Jim Krohmer
Room # 203
411 Second St N.W.
Rochester, MN 55901

INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW...

- We served 196 people at the church 150th anniversary celebration.
- So far, to date, we have sold 30 commemorative crocks.
- Olan Mills pictorial directories should be here very soon! Every family photographed will receive a free copy. Extra copies will be available for purchase.
- A 150th anniversary celebration commemorative DVD will also be available for purchase. If you are interested, a sign-up sheet is in the entryway. More information coming.

PRAYER CONCERNS

The family of Lucy Miele-Auen, The family of Dennis Keller, Kevin Meiners, Kay Gipe, Warren Parker, Allison Hillen, Jim Krohmer, Lucille Groezinger, Donna Wurster, Dennis Ulicny, Bailey McMannus, Robert and Jeanette Yeager, Warren Dailey, Joan Bonvillain, Raymond Steffes, Marlow Townsend, Dan Koester, and the men and women serving in the world's armed forces.

* If anyone has updates on any of the above individuals, please notify one of the newsletter editors so that this can be communicated with the congregation in upcoming issues. Thanks! *

THE NUMBERS ARE IN...

"Thank You" seems inadequate for all the hard work completed before, during, and after the ice cream social. Each of the four committees that were set up had a chairperson, took their responsibilities seriously, and did a spectacular job! I knew I could rely on them and it made my job much easier!

A couple vacationing in the area from Mississippi saw the ad in the newspaper. They had never been to a church social before and decided to attend. They said the selection of food was outstanding and that they had a wonderful time. Another large group gathered at the social to celebrate a birthday. They said that "this restaurant" was a wise choice and that they had a great time.

It always seems that we will never sell all that food, but we did! We served 350-400 people and netted a profit of \$1920.59. Once again, our church family can be very proud of their reputation as good cooks, great bakers, and friendly people who work well together.

"Thank You" again for your help and support in making this a memorable event!

Minnie Lieb, chairperson

Statistics:

65# Italian Beef
40# Bar-B-Q
48 Hot Dogs
80# German Potato Salad
20# Regular Potato Salad
9 Gallons Calico Beans
9 Seven Layer Salads
7 Jello Salads
9 Cottage Cheese
42 Pies
4 Cakes
4 Gallons Ice Cream
"Lots" of Lemonade and Coffee

NOW WHAT?

Well, we are past the official 150th celebration, however, the year is not over! If anyone has suggestions on other ways that the church can celebrate this milestone, such as guest speakers, entertainment, church outings, etc., please notify one of your church council or 150th committee members. Let's keep the ball rolling!

IN APPRECIATION...

The following thank-you was received by Pastor Andersen and the council would like to share with all...

It took me a while to contact everyone because of my traveling schedule. Please accept the enclosed checks as a donation toward the cost of sealcoating and striping the church parking lot.

On behalf of the Cornwall Hounds members, again let me say thank you for the kindness of the St. John Evangelical Church congregation. It is a joy to have the Blessing of the Hounds at the church each year.

*All the best,
John Greene*

DID YOU KNOW?

- A hippo can run as fast as a human
- Your eyes process more than 120 million bits of information every second
- Kangaroos don't hop backward

DON'T FORGET

- Check out www.stjohnmassbach.org
- Adult education classes on Thursday nights at 7:30 PM and tiki torches on occasional Friday nights
- Pray for and support the new St. John Jr./Sr. high youth group

HAVE A GREAT MONTH!

