

# THE GIFT

A Christian Publication by St. John Lutheran

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You may remember that a few months ago I wrote in this space that Christians do not worship on the Sabbath, that instead they worship on Sunday, because every Sunday is a festival of the resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Indeed, every Sunday is a mini-Easter. This created much less conversation than I expected it would, at least much less conversation with me. In any case, that topic is a relevant part of the conversation for this month.

At a recent council meeting, the question was asked, "How often should a congregation celebrate Holy Communion, and why are most churches starting to celebrate communion weekly?" The quick and dirty answers to those two questions are, in order, weekly, and because they should. Of course that is not a very satisfying answer, as the quick and dirty answer rarely is. As it turns out, the ELCA has produced a brief resource that tackles this issue very well. Far be it for me to re-invent the wheel, therefore I would like to take the opportunity to present this excellent resource to you below. Before I do that, I would like to remind you that if you have questions or concerns, feel encouraged to contact me to discuss them.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Andersen

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## ***HOW OFTEN SHOULD A CONGREGATION CELEBRATE HOLY COMMUNION?***

A congregation with an ordained pastor should celebrate Holy Communion every Sunday. Celebrations are also appropriate on other occasions: Saturday evening preparation for Sunday, festivals and lesser festivals, midweek services, the Christian marriage and the burial of the dead, and other occasions on which the congregation assembles.

The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament states this principle clearly:

† Principle 35 According to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Lutheran congregations celebrate the Holy Communion every Sunday and festival. This confession remains the norm for our practice.

† Application 35A The Church celebrates the Holy Communion frequently because the Church needs the sacrament, the means by which the Church's fellowship is

established and its mission as the baptized people of God is nourished and sustained. This practice was reaffirmed in 1989 by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We continue to need "consistent pastoral encouragement and instruction relating to Holy Communion . . . pointing up Christ's command, his promise, and our deep need." For a variety of historical reasons, Lutherans in various places moved away from the weekly celebration of the sacrament.

† Application 35B All of our congregations are encouraged to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly, but not every service need be a Eucharist.

† Application 35C Participation in the sacramental meal is by invitation, not demand. The members of this church are encouraged to make the sacrament a frequent rather than an occasional part of their lives.

The basic pattern of Christian worship is a weekly pattern: from Sunday to Sunday. Even before all Christians could agree on when to celebrate Easter, this weekly pattern was in place. From its earliest days, the community of Christians was described as people who gathered "on the first day of the week." This gathering on the first day of the week was not a matter of convenience, as this was a workday in the ancient world. Rather, it was a witness to the community itself and its surrounding culture to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead on the first day of the week. This celebration involved doing what Christ had asked of his disciples at the Last Supper: "do this in memory of me." In the second century Justin Martyr described the weekly liturgy of Christians:

On the day named after the sun, all who live in the city or countryside assemble in the same place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read for as long as time allows. When the lector has finished, the president addresses us, admonishing us and exhorting us to imitate the splendid things we have heard. Then we all stand and pray and, as we said earlier, when we have finished praying, bread, wine and water are brought up. The president offers prayers of thanksgiving, according to his ability, and the people give their assent with an "Amen."

Next, the gifts over which the thanksgiving has been spoken are distributed, and each one shares in them, while they are also sent via the deacons to the absent brethren. —Apology of Justin Martyr (ca. 150)

In Luther's day, too, the basic celebration in every parish was mass (Holy Communion) on Sunday. Other services (morning and evening prayer on a daily basis, daily mass, processions, and so forth) were also celebrated in congregations that had the resources to do so. At the time of the Reformation, Luther and the Reformers continued the practice they knew of celebrating Holy Communion every Sunday.

The question of how often a congregation celebrates Holy Communion is not the same question as how often an individual baptized Christian should receive the sacrament. In Luther's day, many people felt unworthy to come to receive Holy Communion even though they were attending mass every Sunday or even every day. The thrust of Luther's preaching and catechetical writing often focused precisely on this issue of how to encourage those attending the public celebration of Holy Communion to participate in the fullest possible way by hearing the Word read and preached, singing the praise of God, joining in the prayers, and receiving Holy Communion.

"We should so preach that, of their own accord and without any law, the people will desire the Sacrament and, as it were, compel us pastors to administer it to them" (Preface to The Small Catechism). "Suppose you say, 'What shall I do if I cannot feel this

need or experience hunger and thirst for the Sacrament?’ Answer for persons in such a state of mind that they cannot feel it, I know of no better advice than to suggest that they put their hands to their bosom and ask whether they are made of flesh and blood. . . . “ (The Large Catechism 5:75).

Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are moving steadily to more frequent celebrations of Holy Communion. Current figures from congregational reports indicate that the monthly pattern of celebration is now in the minority among congregations. Weekly celebration or celebration every second week with additional celebrations on festivals is now the majority pattern.

Continued emphasis, teaching, and encouragement is called for if the church is to carry through on its stated commitment to celebrate the Holy Communion each Sunday in its congregations.

In brief, it may be said that the arguments for this recovery of the weekly Sunday Eucharist are based in scriptural, confessional and historical warrants (the church of the New Testament and of the Confessions is a church of weekly Eucharist), liturgical meaning and pastoral need (the weekly assembly is most clearly centered when it is an assembly for the Word and Sacrament), and theological integrity (the weekly assembly continues to have to do with Jesus when it has to do with this Meal). The argument is that the Lord’s Day, the ancient day of the Eucharist, the day of liturgical centering for the assembly, the day of the remembrance of Jesus in assembly, is the day for the Lord’s Supper. Lord’s Day and Lord’s Supper ought to be inseparably linked for us (Gordon Lathrop, "Toward doing the confession").

We have been given the special promise of Christ’s presence in Word and Sacrament. The times in which we live now pose the urgent pastoral question, Why should we not act on this promise to keep Christ at the center of our Sunday assemblies? No ideology, project, theme or other emphasis should ever be allowed to move Christ from the center. The societal supports we could once take for granted are rapidly passing away in favor of a non-Christian or post-Christian context for daily life and work. What better foundation on which to build and to reorganize our personal lives of faith and our assemblies together for worship around than Christ—really present—in Word and Sacrament each week!

Other assemblies on Sunday, before or after the congregation’s celebration of Holy Communion, and assemblies on other days of the week, should also draw from the riches of Christian patterns of daily prayer, preaching, and so forth. The liturgy for Holy Communion is not the only way that Christians worship God. When no ordained pastor is available to preside, the congregation will need to use one of these other forms of worship. Centering our life together on the Lord’s Supper each Lord’s Day is the foundation for growth.

Revised December 2002

**RESOURCES:**

† Gordon Lathrop, "Toward Doing the Confession: The Lord’s Supper on the Lord’s Day," Lutheran Forum, Reformation 1978.

† The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament. Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1997.

**REFLECTIONS OF GENEROSITY**

Dear St. John’s Church Members,

Every year we are astounded at the generosity you show to our families. I know the families truly appreciated what they received, especially the mother who received a new winter coat. For all that you do, thanks!!

P.S. A special thanks to Pat Townsend and her elves that helped deliver the gifts.

Sharon Nolan Randall  
Program Coordinator/Supervisor  
FHN Parent Enrichment Program



Dear Friends:

The staff and individuals served by Rainbow Ridge would like to thank you for your kind donation of \$142.50. It is through your generous contribution that the agency is able to improve the quality of life and the services that are provided to all that we serve.

We appreciate your generosity in assisting Rainbow Ridge in providing quality services. Your kindness will not be forgotten.

With our thanks,

Ron Heiderscheit  
Program Director



St. John Lutheran Church,

Thank you for your tax-deductible contribution to the Elizabeth Community Ambulance Service during the year 2007 in the amount of \$50.

Elizabeth Community Ambulance Service

**EXPRESSIONS  
OF  
APPRECIATION**

Thanks to everyone for your kindness of remembering me after my accident and my bout with shingles. All the prayers, cards, flowers, and gifts were appreciated. Thanks also to all who visited me at the hospital and at home. What a pleasure to know we have so many friends.

Clyde Eden

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Thanks so very much for the Christmas gift certificate to Prime Table. It was very thoughtful and I will enjoy it – thinking of you.

Sincerely,  
Sharon Eden

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We would like to thank the congregation for the gift certificate given to us for Christmas. We also want to thank Jeff, Sharon, Justin, and Ryan Randecker for all their help. Everything was very much appreciated. We wish you God's richest blessings.

Eugene and Gloria  
Endress

It is hard to find words to show our appreciation for all that was done for us in 2007.

Thank you for all the cards, visits and prayers during the year Raymond was in the hospital, nursing home, and now home. Also for the carolers who stopped and sang and made it a beautiful day.

Thank you for all the Christmas goodies from persons and the church, to Pastor for his visits and communion, and to those who brought us the bulletins and newsletters. It was a rough year, but we made it and hope the weather gets better soon so we can get to church.

Love and God Bless,  
Raymond and Florence  
Steffes

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Ernie and Minnie Lieb traveled to Nebraska last month to celebrate the one year anniversary of Allison Hillen's triple transplant as well as her other accomplishments this past year, including

college graduation in  
May, internship

completion in  
December, and her 24<sup>th</sup>  
birthday. She is  
currently pursuing a  
career as a Child Life  
Specialist. Allison is  
definitely a walking  
miracle and is doing  
spectacular! Thank you  
for your prayers and  
support throughout the  
past year. Please  
continue to keep her  
donor's family in your  
prayers.

Ernie and Minnie Lieb

## **TRUST IN HIM!**

Prayer concerns this past month have included the following: The Family of Lucille Groezinger, Meredith Townsend, Mary Lou (Krohmer) Shaw, Lowell Hill, Joe Dvorak Sr., Allen Randecker, Clyde Eden, Jack Reel, Kevin Meiners, Warren Parker, Dennis Ulicny, Bailey McMannus, Jeanette Yeager, Dan Koester, and the men and women serving in the world's armed forces.

## **SIMPLY GIVE...WITH SIMPLY GIVING!**

Just a reminder to St. John members that those interested can still sign up with the Simply Giving program. This allows for regular monetary contributions through a direct withdrawal from a designated bank account. If interested, please see Joe Dvorak for information and arrangements.

## **GOING ONCE, GOING TWICE**

Special thanks to those who donated their time on Saturday, January 26<sup>th</sup> to clean the basement back room! Take a moment to look at the unique items on the table situated just outside the room. If something entices you or looks vaguely familiar, the cost is right – FREE! Another clean up day will be scheduled in the near future. If you have any suggestions on how to optimize presentation and/or usage of the room, please see one of your council members.

## **ELECTION RESULTS**

Thanks to all those who agreed to accept a nomination during the latest annual meeting election. A new St. John election record was set, as there were two ties that had to be broken! Congratulations to the following individuals:

Council: Eldon Carroll, Jan Klopff, Rene Albrecht, and Marilee Hejna

Auditing Committee: George Hejna

Nominating Committee: Janet Dvorak, Minnie Lieb, Shirley Scheele

Memorial Committee: Julie Yuswak

Financial Secretary: Vicki Wurster

Synod Convention Delegates: Pam Staver and Jen Johnson

## **ARE YOU A “NUMBER CRUNCHER?”**

Many thanks goes out to Meredith Townsend for the countless hours he has spent as our Church Treasurer. Great Job! If you are interested in volunteering your time and talent by acting as St. John's Treasurer, please see Pastor Andersen or one of your council members.

**GODS BLESSINGS THIS MONTH!**