

Pastor's Report

2010

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The past year has been a very exciting and transitional time at St. Paul. We continue to faithfully follow the leading of the Holy Spirit as we; **G**ather to be fed, **O**ffer our praise, and **D**eport to serve. We have experienced some additional major staff changes— we have called a part-time Diaconal Minister and a full-time Associate Pastor. We are currently discerning how God will lead us in the areas of children, youth, and young families. The change in our full-time Family and Youth Coordinator position leads us to a time of discernment and renewal.

As we look to the future with a sense of mixed emotions including excitement, trepidation, fear of the unknown, and joy in God's promise to be with us let us refer to scripture. I am reminded of the passage from II Corinthians 12: 6-10—

⁶But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, ⁷even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. ⁸Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, ⁹but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

The apostle Paul knew a lot about trouble. In the passage he speaks about his thorn in the flesh. Paul prayed to God three times to take it away, and I can almost guarantee those weren't little polite prayers devoid of emotion. Paul was a man of prayer, and he would've prayed to the depths of his soul.

But even so, God didn't take away the thorn, whatever it was. Instead, God gave Paul something far better; he gave him the promise of his presence with Paul and the assurance that His grace was sufficient for Paul that His power is made perfect in human weakness.

Our Lord is the giver of new life, and this new life can come at many different levels while we live here on earth. New life doesn't just come to us through our times of joy and contentment. We follow a powerful Lord who is more than able to take our setbacks and to turn them into times of spiritual growing and wholeness, so that we can look back and see how we were transformed and blessed through these setbacks.

With Jesus Christ as our Lord, we don't need to fear death or the anxieties of this life. We don't need to fear problems and setbacks. Because Jesus lives and is always present with us, He has set us free to truly live no matter what the day might bring.

I am beginning my sixth year as your lead pastor. I am blessed to be your pastor as we continue to grow in our partnership in ministry. I would like to share my involvement as pastor in four major areas of ministry.

I. Christian Education

I continue to offer a Monday afternoon Bible Study on different subjects in the Bible and various areas of group interest. We finished the Book of Romans, completed a brief overview of the current immigration situation and another study on the Islam religion, and are currently looking at the spirituality of the Native Americans of North America. I led a "road trip" to the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg to hear a lecture by the Rev. Dr. Susan Hedahl on the Islam religion. I invited Lilleana Arias, a former parishioner from York Springs, to speak to the Bible Study group about her personal experiences with American immigration.

During Vacation Bible School I offered a class from the ELCA resource called "The Book of Faith Initiative." I offered the same course at a local restaurant for several weeks as a brunch bible study and it was well received. I will be offering another study at the same time and venue during Advent of this year.

The weekly Post-Prison Bible Study continues into the second full year. We are looking at 'next-steps' for this ministry. In conjunction with Chaplain Foshee from the Cumberland County Prison, Rev. Sadie Pounder coordinator of the LSS prison ministry

initiative, Bill Shearer, Wayne Sweigert, and Pastor Bowman we are discerning the future of this valuable ministry.

During the past year I led two First Communion Classes. The new communicant, his/her parents, and I meet together for several sessions where we explore the concept of “our place at God’s table.” Pastor Carol is currently advertising for a third class and we will be alternating this process in the future.

Our confirmation program is now in its third full year and we currently have 10 candidates for confirmation participating in this program. I had the opportunity to lead a confirmation trip to the Grotto at Mount St. Mary in Emmitsburg, Maryland and the Native American Museum on the Mall in Washington, D.C. and another trip to Christ Lutheran in Baltimore, Maryland and the National Aquarium.

I had the opportunity to teach a “God and Me” class. This program is part of both Boy and Girl Scout activities.

I continue to teach a pastor’s class every Sunday morning during the Sunday School hour and enjoy this class as we continue to look at our Lutheran Christian identity. This class also serves as a resource for those joining our ranks as new disciples here at St. Paul. I’m currently leading a study through a book about “Conversations with Martin Luther.”

Last January we had our third annual congregation council retreat. We traveled to Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania where we utilized the Wittell Farm (retreat house of the Lower Susquehanna Synod.) This year we concentrated on an exercise called *Lebenslauf* (a way to look at one self and share so others can understand a little better how to be in relationship with you.)

We continue to look at our Sunday Christian Education program. This is an area of concentration for our new Associate Pastor. With the change in our staffing I’m looking forward to new ideas and a renewing of this area of our ministry. We have begun a new post-confirmation group led by Rocky Brent and Katelin Pirkheim. The younger classes are using the resource through the Augsburg Fortress called “Spark.” This younger group and their parents is where we need to focus our Spirit-led renewal. Part of this renewal will be looking beyond the traditional Sunday paradigm to Christian Education offered at more relevant times for our contemporary society. The adult Sunday school classes seem to be thriving and that is a blessing.

I had the opportunity to lead a worship service for the youth winter retreat. The retreat took place at the “Loft” on Petersburg Road.

I had individual interviews with those confirmands who were about to be confirmed and their parents/guardians. This also gives me an opportunity to have some evaluation from our confirmands considering the program, teachers, and teaching methods.

II. The Greater Church

I have served my final year on Synod Council and as of June of this year have completed that obligation. I have been appointed to the synodical Personnel Committee and will participate with this group. I have been asked to be part of a new synodical task force looking at ‘relevant worship’. I look forward to serving on this task force. I attended the “gathering of the ministerium” regarding the ELCA stance on the human sexuality social statement.

I attended our annual Synod Assembly for the Lower Susquehanna Synod. I would like to thank our voting members who attended from St. Paul for the year 2010 and they were Debra Nelson and Bill Suchocki. Attending these assemblies is an integral part of who we are as the church. I would like to encourage anyone who has not attended a synod assembly to consider this in the future.

I attend the monthly meetings of the West Cumberland Conference. This is a gathering of rostered leaders of the ELCA from the greater Carlisle area. Last year we hosted the December monthly meeting and the Spring Assembly meeting for the West Cumberland Conference. At both of these events, as with many others throughout our various ministries, our Fellowship Committee offered a lovely and scrumptious feast for our guests.

I am co-chair of a synodical committee whose purpose is to be a resource for a congregation who is currently under synodical administration. We meet with the congregation council once every three or four months. I had the opportunity to help lead a retreat during last spring for this congregation.

III. Stewardship

We are blessed to have a new person involved with our stewardship committee. Toward the latter part of November we will have a meeting with the Rev. David Fisher

from the Lower Susquehanna Synod and a deployed staff person from the ELCA Chicago national office. The purpose of this meeting is to help us move forward with stewardship awareness within the congregation.

I wrote an article in our November Epistle referring to our need to address our current stewardship situation. There will be temple talks within the next few weeks beginning the process of stewardship awareness.

IV. Community Involvement

I continue to participate in the Carlisle Ministerium. I continue to write bi-monthly articles to the Faith in Focus section of our local paper "The Sentinel." We offer worship to the community at Manor Care on Sunday afternoons and over the past year we have been there five times. This worship is successful through the generous offering of many of our parishioners who take time in their busy schedules to offer themselves on these Sunday afternoons—I "Thank You." The first half of this year I read to the ABC nursery. With the closing of ABC Nursery we have opened our doors to Head Start and they are up and running.

This year we held a Veterans Remembrance Worship and dinner. With the passion of Virginia Lopez and various ministries of St. Paul we had a wonderful turnout for this event and look forward to our second annual service in a few days.

We held our first celebration of Earth Day. The Green Team task force led a wonderful event during a Sunday school hour. I believe this event will be continued as an annual event.

I had the opportunity to speak at the Carlisle Are Newcomers Club. This event was a remembrance service for those who had died over the past year.

I had the opportunity to participate in the community Good Friday Stations of the Cross Service. We had a very good showing of participants from St. Paul and I presided over the last station on the square.

I have been given the opportunity to open Project Share with devotions and prayer several times this year.

I continue to offer pastoral counseling and have found this to be a growing area in my ministry with St. Paul. My pastoral counseling includes non-members of this church who are primarily referred to me by members of this congregation.

Other activities: Blessing of Backpacks (WELCA), Bishop's Convocation, Block Party, Spoke at our Prayer Shawl gathering, Commissioning of Stephen Leader and Minister, luncheons with two college students from this congregation who are discerning a leading to go into the ministry, participated in a blessing of the new resource center for CARES, over the past year I participated in all but one of our staff evaluations the last one should be done in the next few months, participated in both call processes for Dr. Holly Hoffman and Pastor Carol Bowman, accompanied quilt and health kits to New Windsor, presided at our mid-week Lenten luncheons, co-taught a series of training sessions for Stephen Ministers, and hosted a Luther movie night.

Since my last annual report we have: baptized 12, married 6 couples, received 13 new disciples and 1 associate member, 13 disciples have gone to the Church Triumphant and 3 people have transferred. I have attached to this annual report the Trend Report which will give you a comparison and review of more statistics over the past several years.

We are still discerning where we go with possible renovations as more and more repair situations come to light. The challenge is not doing major repairs that would need to be redone if there is a renovation project put into place. We continue to be in prayer about this situation.

Our worship life at St. Paul is very rich and diverse. We continue with five established worship services during the week. At this time we have worship opportunities: Wednesday 7:30 a.m.; Wednesday 6:00 p.m.; Saturday 5:15 p.m.; and Sunday 8:00 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.. The Animal Blessing Service is now an established worship service now into its third year. We all can be thankful for the superb music ministry Bill Hemminger continues to share with us. The inclusion of the St. Paul's Brass in our worship on festivals continues to be a blessing.

Whether we experience joy, sorrow, happiness, or pain, our Lord is with us through it all. That is a promise we can believe as we journey together as the body of Christ called St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Let us pray:

Almighty God, your blessings are poured out upon us in abundance. You give us life and enter fully into that life with us. You are there in our rejoicing, and you are there to catch us when we're thrown off balance. And always you promise that no matter what life brings, your grace is sufficient. It will be your love and mercy and goodness that see us through it all. We give you thanks in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.