

From Pastor Telloni . . .

I have been doing a lot of reading lately, along with observing trends and interests here and throughout the country, with regard to values and commitments and relationships – both family, church, and civic. As I do so, I try to relate what I see and hear to views toward, and relationships with, Christianity and the Church.

What knowledge I have gained is significant because I sense a movement in the culture away from some of the post-modern and “woke” thoughts and behavior that have been injected into the fabric of our society. I am not surprised, because there are always pushbacks from generation to generation, that is, the young rebelling from and rejecting values and habits of the older generation and inventing new ones.

I have read that today’s young are starting to enjoy going shopping in person rather than purchasing online. They are even turned off by some of the music of their parents (rock and roll!) and looking for more meaningful music and art. There is a trend brewing of stopping work at home and returning to their places of employment (relationships are important). People are returning to movie theaters rather than hunkering down at home and watching Netflix. Schools are considering demanding that students give up their cell phones when they arrive so that teachers and students may interact with each other in the classroom without distractions. When all is said and done, it seems that real person-to-person relationships are making a comeback – a welcome trend for all people in a world created by God who said, “*It is not good that the man should be alone . . .*”

Relationships! I just returned from the SELC District Convention in Lake Mary, FL. We belong to a non-geographical district, spread out from Montreal to Tampa, from Connecticut to St. Louis. Yet we are a warm and loving district where pastors cherish relationships with their peers despite the distances, and eagerly seek to gather together for worship, study, mission, and mutual conversations and consolations.

God created human beings to be social creatures. “*Social*” means: “*relating to or involving activities in which people spend time talking to each other or doing enjoyable things with each other.*” If the recent pandemic taught us anything, it is that separation from others and isolation from interactions with people can trigger unhealthy psychological attitudes, depression, and even desperation.

This is why it is refreshing to learn that things are changing in our society, as was noted above. Now, let us consider the impact that this may have on our churches, specifically St. John Lutheran Church. While it is true that church attendance is declining in all denominations, the effect of covid-19 on once faithful members caused many of them to stay away or to take active church membership for granted. Thus, many may have taken a casual stance on weekly worship which causes indifference regarding maintaining and strengthening relationships with fellow members – and with the Lord.

Let me ask you, my dear fellow members of St. John, “*What is your relationship to this congregation? How strong is your love and care for brothers and sisters in Christ? What motivates you to go to church? Are you spiritually hungry for God’s Word and love for your family of faith?*”

About six months ago, your pastors and elders sent a letter to members who have “*decided*” (yes, decided!) to absent themselves, or to disappear, from worship and any participation in the life of their spiritual home for a long time. We assured them that we love them and need their presence in our family gatherings.

So the one question we asked them, in pursuit of sincere truth and out of love for them, who are souls for whom Jesus gave His life on the cross, “*Would you please tell us how you are and how we can help or care for you? What is your relationship to St. John?*”

Praise God! – a few by word and action have responded. Sadly, most of them have not replied, for reasons unknown to us. Our spiritual leaders do not remove anyone from congregational membership (or, as many in this and other congregations in the past have said, “*They kicked me out!*” But the dispiriting and tragic truth is that they themselves by thought, word, and deed are “*removing themselves*” from this fellowship.

In the meantime, “*... let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near*” (Heb. 10:24-25). You, my fellow members of St. John (*the Apostle of love*), are key witnesses to your family, friends, and neighbors of the truth and salvation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, witnesses who are the pillars of His House in this troubled generation and the examples for the old and the young, especially the up-and-coming youth who need faithful models for living under our Savior and Shepherd. My friends, the Lord Jesus promised that no one or nothing can ever sever or destroy His holy Church. You are His visible guardians in this sinful world. May the Holy Spirit richly grace and guide you in your crucial role, as Luther said, in being “*little Christs.*”

May Jesus Christ, God the Father’s ultimate “*Epiphany,*” grant you peace always!

Pastor John Telloni



January 11, 2025

To: Members of St. John Lutheran Church



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I want to respectfully announce that I have received a call from the saints at St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church in Norton, OH (SELC District LCMS).

May the Holy Spirit guide and direct me as I deliberate where He intends me to serve the saints of God so that His will be done for His Church. I am happy to hear your thoughts and answer any questions you may have.

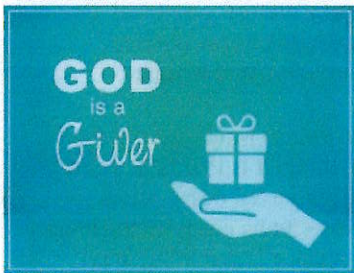
Please remember me and my family in your prayers.

In Christ,

Pastor Jon C. Carpenter

STEWARDSHIP CORNER GENEROSITY IN GOD'S IMAGE

The following article was taken from "The Lutheran Witness."



I want you to take just a moment to identify in your mind your most prized possession. Is it your home? Your car? Maybe it's your children? There are no wrong answers. I want to identify that thing that you value most in your life. Can you see it?

What if I told you that I could prove that that thing you prize most doesn't even belong to you? Here is what God says about that thing! "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers" (Psalm 24:1). Your most prized possession belongs to someone else! It isn't yours. And if you continue to think like this, remember we have a word for claiming ownership of something that belongs to another!

But lest you think you are a thief — I know that there is a reason you have that thing. God has entrusted it to you for a purpose. In fact, this is the purpose for which you were created.

You were created by God in His image: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:26-27).

The original Hebrew for image means "reflection." You were created by God to reflect His will among creation. Reading further in Genesis, we hear: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish

of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:28). This means that dominion and subjection are not about our power, but God's glory. We reflect His will in our world by reflecting His generosity.

We see that exquisite generosity most clearly at the cross. There God gave His one and only Son for people like you and me, who regularly claim not just God's stuff as our own, but also His place as Lord! When we think we own things, we are not just miserly or cheap. We are idolators! That isn't a good reflection.

But remember where we started? I am baptized! Paul reminds the Galatians and us, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). This means you bear a new image. You bear the image of Jesus. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Col. 1:15). You bear that as you are the generous reflection of God's love and mercy to those around you in the world.

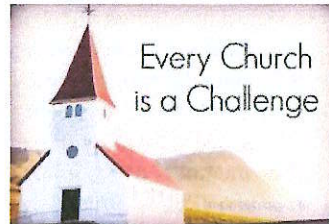
This means we are stewards of the Gospel of the One who was the perfect Steward where we are the failed stewards. He gave it all for the world and you. This generosity happens here in the offering plate. But it goes well beyond these hallowed walls. When we are generous with people, especially those who seek to share the Gospel with others beyond our church, we are truly giving thanks to the King! "Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee."

May your thankfulness and trust in the Lord be reflected in your Stewardship!

- Board of Stewardship – Luther Russert, Chairman

STEWARDSHIP STRUGGLES & CHALLENGES

Looking at our year-to-date statistical reports, I am pleased to see that both our membership, attendance, and financial giving have increased in 2024 vs 2023. However, as we begin the year 2025, we are facing a real financial struggle within our church. As of December 31, 2024, there are outstanding bills/invoices amounting to \$18,764.67. Maintaining our facility has and is becoming a real struggle.



A heartfelt thanks to everyone that "Stepped Up" their 2025 pledges so that we can support both our ministry here at St. John's and our mission to "Restoring Broken People to Life in Christ." We pray that the Lord will guide us as decisions are made to address our financial struggles and that we keep our eyes focused on HIM as the challenges will prayerfully open doors for new opportunities and ideas to meet our needs here in Massillon.

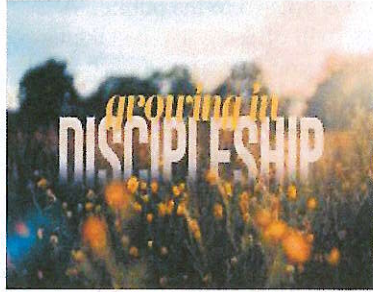
May your thankfulness and trust in the Lord be reflected in your Stewardship!

- Board of Stewardship, Luther Russert, Chairman



DISCIPLESHIP

In a podcast entitled "Discipleship-Driven," Rev. Tige Culbertson describes a life of discipleship at his church, St Luke's Lutheran Church in Oviedo, Florida (motto pictured above). Pastor Culbertson is a guest of Pastor Mark Larson and Pastor Jacob Hoyer on the podcast available on the SELC Church Planting website.



By the power of the Holy Spirit, St Luke grows in discipleship as they engage in Worship Gatherings, Spiritual Formation Groups, and Community Connections. Part of this involves living out their faith at home, at work and in their neighborhood. Discipleship does not end at catechism.

Sometimes we see faith as coming from studying the way of Jesus such that it might be just a little on the academic side. In the Discipleship-Driven podcast, Pastor Larson describes a professor he had who once said that smiling makes you happy. This is somewhat contrary to what we often think. We think that we smile because we are happy. However, there are times when just the act of smiling can induce happiness.

Pastor Culbertson stated that putting faith into practice can be enjoyable. In a new church, he suggested that an easy first step for discipleship might be a simple program such as "Come with Me" that involves church leadership serving with some "disciples" at a not-for profit organization.

We may be reluctant to put works into action for fear of believing works-righteousness salvation. Although our works never merit salvation (for it is by grace alone), God does want us to be His people. In the same way that smiling makes us happy, there are times when faith in action can help us as followers of Christ.

When asked what a congregation might look like if it was discipleship-driven, Pastor Culbertson replied that rather than soaking in the shallows, the congregation would be filled with joy, excitement and a sense of adventure to plunge into some deep waters and really grow more into the likeness of Christ.

- Blessings in Christ, Mary Kay Pershing
Chairperson, Board of Outreach

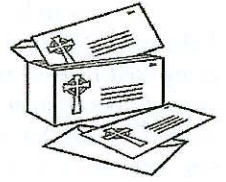
2025 FLOWER CHART IS POSTED

on the front bulletin board. If you want to select a date(s) for your donation, please sign the list or call the Church Office (330-837-4645). **The cost for 2 vases remains \$50.00.** Donors should make checks payable to "St. John Lutheran Church." **Flower Fund Envelopes are available for your convenience in the Narthex.**



2025 OFFERING ENVELOPES

are available on the table in the Gathering Place. *If you would like a financial statement for 2024, please see Barb Leffler in the church office on Sundays after the service or call the church office (330-837-4546.)*



2025 CALENDARS



can be picked up on the table in the narthex. We are grateful that Paquelet has provided this service for many years.

THE LIFE WITH GOD CLASS



will begin soon! This is a 6-8 week class for those who are preparing for membership or for members reviewing our teachings. The curriculum is called "Rooted in the Faith - Living in Christ." There is a sign-up sheet posted on the front bulletin board for those interested.

Pass the word on to family or friends. Reviewing the Gospel and faith and life in Christ can enrich your walk with HIM as His witness to others!

MONDAY MORNING BIBLE CLASS

continues to meet every Monday at 10:00 am in Rooms 112-113.

New Topic: "The Three Love Letters of St. John the Apostle: Looking Back to Prepare for the Future!" The "beloved disciple" proclaims the Gospel to the churches of Asia Minor in order to encourage them with the true love of Christ to witness to the world in their troubled times, a message relevant to today's Church. The conversation will also address how this Word of God impacts our St. John congregation. Pastor Telloni is the discussion leader for 1, 2, and 3 John.



VOTERS' ASSEMBLY MEETING

Congregational Meeting



The next regular Voters' Assembly meeting will be held on Sunday, February 16, 2025, immediately after the Divine Service, in the Fellowship Hall. On the agenda will be regular reports of the Church Council and

boards, a report from then recent SELC District Convention in Lake Mary, FL. All communicant members in good standing 18 and above are eligible to vote. Guests are welcome and have the privilege to speak. A packet containing the agenda and reports will be provided on February 9th.

FELLOWSHIP GAME NIGHTS

We will be having *Fellowship Game Nights* on **Friday February, 21st** and **Friday, March 21st** at 7:00 pm. Please bring your favorite board game, and a snack or beverage to share. If you don't enjoy playing games, you are still welcome to join us for the fellowship. If you have any questions, please see Connie Ribaud.



THE MARTHA SOCIETY



will hold their monthly meeting on Tuesday, February 11th at 11 am at the church. Questions, contact Mickey Krnach.

THE MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

continues to meet on the 1st Thursday of each month at 11:00 a.m. at Varieties Restaurant on Lincolnway East in Massillon. Questions, contact Gene Stocker.



THE ST. JOHN QUILTERS



get together on the 3rd Wednesday of each month from 9:30 am - 2:30 pm. *Bring a lunch!* If you like to quilt and are willing to serve others in need, see Janet Dyer or Jeanette Tennant. *Donations of monetary gifts for shipping and supplies are always welcomed!*

SALARIED CUSTODIAN NEEDED

Custodial duties include, but not limited to, emptying refuse cans in all rooms, mopping, vacuuming the Sanctuary and all rooms as needed, which includes dusting shelves and ledges, cleaning bathrooms and all the public areas. There may be special events that require custodial services. 10 hours a week; days and hours are negotiable.



THANK YOU TO



all who helped with the holiday decorating and taking down: Dennis Brown, Sr.; Pastor Jon & Shannon Carpenter & family; Kathleen DeFine; Janet Dyer; Jason & Lena Kompara & family; Dennis Lillich; Gloria Pavelzik; Dr. Lewis Porter; Dan Rohr; Russ & Denise Ryder; Rosemary Sedjo; Greg Sturm; Jeanette Tennant and Pastor John Telloni.

SPAGHETTI DINNER

sponsored by St. John's Scout Troop #257, is planned for Sunday, March 2nd immediately following the service and is opened to the public. A free-will offering will be taken. Thank you for your support - Rick Ott, Scout Liaison.



THE MOBILE SNACK COMMITTEE

delivered home-baked cookies to 17 persons on January 29th. Thank you to our drivers: Dennis Lillich; Gene Stocker & Dennis Brown. Our kitchen crew were Deb Stocker; Karen Mobberly & Rosemary Sedjo. We will mobilize again on Wednesday, February 26th.



The committee would like to reach shut-ins who live beyond the Massillon area, like Canal Fulton, Canton, North Canton, and Tuslaw. We strongly encourage you to give your **Time** (one hour of delivery once a month), **Talent** (home-made desserts once or twice a year), and **Treasure** (donations to purchase fresh fruit, snacks or bags). And the topper is that the shut-ins are so grateful for a visit from fellow members!! If interested, please see Rosemary Sedjo or Deb Stocker.

BABY BOTTLE BOOMERANG

is a yearly fund-raising campaign to benefit the Christian Care Centers, Pregnancy & Family Care Center. By filling a bottle, you are helping to provide free life-affirming services such as: pregnancy testing, parenting education, counseling, and baby supplies.



Bottles can be picked up on the Project Central table in the Gathering Place. Fill the bottle with your change (and bills or checks!) and support this vital local mission! Fill a bottle, Change a life!

IMPACT MASSILLON



is a one-day (scheduled for Saturday, June 7th) Christian community service event organized by a Leadership Team of volunteers. All denominations come together to demonstrate the love of God through service at NO COST to homeowners and residents of a specific neighborhood within the city of Massillon. If you would like to volunteer, a sign-up sheet is posted on the front bulletin board. For more information or questions, please see Pastor Carpenter.

THE SELC DISTRICT CONVENTION, LAKE MARY, FLORIDA
January 16 - 19, 2025

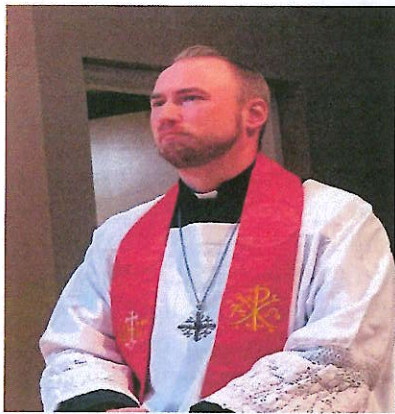


The 2025 SELC District Convention opened on Thursday, January 16th, with a worship service with the theme “*Called to be Light,*” based on Paul’s words from Acts 13:47, “For so the Lord has commanded us saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” The gathering was blessed in this service by a message delivered by LCMS President Matthew Harrison who reminded everyone that we are called to be light in every place we go, even in the darkness that we see gathering in our lives and in our world. During our service, worshipers were able to rejoice as Rev. Miguel Torneire was installed as the SELC’s newest missionary to the Hispanic population in St. Louis. After the conclusion of the service, folks enjoyed a wonderful time of fellowship while Mt. Eleanor Traveling Band, led by Rev. Adam Barcott, provided entertainment. It is exciting to be gathered from all corners of our “*district without borders*” to learn what God is doing and how we can go into our communities refreshed and renewed as we are all “*Called to be Light!*”

Pictured from left to right are the pastors who participated in the Installation of Rev. Tomeire: Rev. Ron Meyr, Rev. Mark Larson, Rev. John Telloni, Rev. Wally Arp, SELC President Vinovskis, Rev. Miguel Torneire, LCMS President Matthew Harrison, Rev. Carl Kruger, Rev. George Hansell, Rev. Chris Cahill, Rev. James Fernandez.

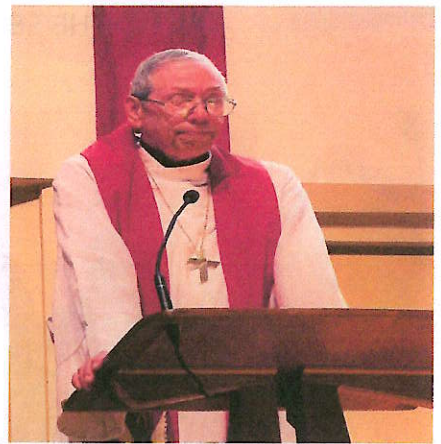


Friday morning included Circuit meetings to elect their Pastoral and Lay representatives to the Synod Convention in 2026. To the left are the Pastoral delegates and alternates, including Pastor Carpenter on the far left. By the way, Pastor Carpenter was elected as the Central Circuit Pastoral Delegate to the 2026 LCMS Convention.



On Saturday, January 18th, the afternoon session began with a Memorial Service led by Rev. Gordon Naumann (left) of Hazleton, PA, with Rev. John Telloni (right) proclaiming God's Word. Pastor Telloni reminded us of the blessings of those we have loved and have died in the faith pointing us, in the end, to the eternal joy we will all experience when Jesus Himself calls us home to be with him forever.

The service and sermon may be viewed on YouTube; search for "SELC Convention 2025 Saturday Afternoon."



Installation of Officers and Rev. Russell Peterson at Holy Cross, Lake Mary

The convention officially came to a close on Sunday morning as we worshipped our Lord and received His blessed sacrament. Rev. Ben Hoyer, Host Pastor, led the worship service that both the Convention attendees and members of Holy Cross attended.

During the service, LCMS President Matthew Harrison installed newly re-elected SELC President Wally Vinovskis during the service. Also participating in the Installation were LCMS 1st VP Rev. Peter Lange, President Harrison, and President Vinovskis. Following his installation, President Vinovskis installed all members of the Board of Directors and Circuit Visitors. From left to right: Rev. James Fernandez, Rev. George Hansell, Rev. Troy Countryman, Rev. Jon Palmer, Irene Bray, Rev. Wally Arp, President Vinovskis, Rev. Chris Cahill, Rev. John Telloni, Deborah St-Onge, Grace Killian, and Rev. James Douthwaite.



After the Opening Service on Thursday, a reception was held in the outside courtyard of Holy Cross. Refreshments were served and delegates and guests fellowshiped together, welcoming long-time friends and meeting new ones.

Entertainment was provided by Mt. Eleanor Traveling Band, led by Rev. Adam Barcott. In the photo to the left, LCMS President Harrison (far left), an accomplished banjo player, joined the country group in playing selections through the evening.

As you can see, Arielle Carpenter, daughter of Pastor and Shannon Carpenter, showcased her dancing talent to the tunes being played. Rumor has it that Pastor Cahill of Lodi, OH, coaxed her to enter the dance floor and show her stuff!

The Home

A Kingdom of Law and Gospel

Luther says that the Fourth Commandment is the most important commandment in the second table of the Law (Commandments 4–10). It's the source of all temporal blessings; good order in the home; and love, peace and even joy in society (LC I 126). "Honor your father and your mother, that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth," as the old translation of the catechism said.

This temporal promise is a good reason, says Luther, for us to honor our parents and other authorities. Furthermore, "all authority flows and is born from the authority of parents" (LC I 141). "To God, to parents, and to teachers we can never offer enough thanks and compensation" (LC I 130). "All whom we call 'masters' are in the place of parents and must get their power and authority to govern from them" (LC I 142). A home where honor and respect for parents and authority exists is very pleasing to God, Luther asserts,

and He generally rewards it richly with temporal blessings. When children dishonor parents from their own sinfulness or are driven to it by unjust and unloving parents, the results are bad. A person who won't be obedient to parents or other authorities in love, or who misuses authority, "will become a victim to the hangman" (LC I 151). Luther tells the children: "If, therefore, you will not obey father and mother and submit to their discipline, then obey the hangman" (LC I 135).

The home is a "left-hand" kingdom or realm, where the law is to be kept, and a place where the transgression of the law requires punishment. Where it is kept, blessings abound.

Luther speaks about the exercise of authority by the Christian ruler in the same way he speaks about parental rule in the home. A Christian prince has a duty "toward his subjects ... [of] love and Christian service" (AE 45:126). He should consider how he has been humbly served by Christ, and then serve his subject in like manner.



A Christian prince is not to be high-handed and make all decisions by himself. A Christian prince is to deal justly with evildoers. But he should not listen to “fire-eaters” who would stir up a war. “He is a mighty poor Christian who for the sake of a single castle would put the whole land in jeopardy” (AE 45:124).

Think of how the following description by Luther of four characteristics of a Christian ruler also apply to fathers and mothers in the Christian home. The home is like the state. Honor and respect for authority are necessary. But for Christians, the “right-hand” realm (or the Gospel and all it entails) also comes to bear:

A prince’s duty is fourfold: First, toward God there must be true confidence and earnest prayer; second, toward his subjects there must be love and Christian service; third, with respect to his counselors and officials he must maintain an untrammled reason and unfettered judgment; fourth, with respect to evildoers he must manifest a restrained severity and firmness. Then the prince’s job will be done right ... [T]he cross will soon rest on the shoulders of such a prince. (AE 45:126)

This is all great advice for parents. A Christian parent needs to know that Christ has claimed him or her in Baptism and will sustain that parent with what is needed to meet the challenge of bringing up children. Second, “there must be love and Christian service.” Where does this come from? Christ. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son” (JOHN 3:16). Every Christian parent is the recipient of “grace upon grace,” forgiveness and love. The chief divine service of God is that He serves sinners forgiveness in Jesus by means of His Word of the Gospel, Absolution, Baptism and Supper. “As he gives himself for us with his body and blood in order to redeem us from all misery, so we too are to give ourselves with might and main for our neighbor” (AE 36:352). Parents, there’s no closer “neighbor” than the kid in your lap in diapers, or the teen playing video games in your basement.

A vital component often missing in Christian homes is the Gospel. The Fourth Commandment calls on parents to rule the roost, to be sure (Law).

But we are sinners. We fail. Kids fail. Parents fail. Forgiveness is needed more than anything (Gospel). So often when a child sins or fails morally, the Law has the first and last word.

Dad: “Are you sorry?”

Kid: *Sniff, sniff.* “Yes, dad.”

Dad: “Good. If you do that again you’re going to be grounded for a month!”

Kid: “Sorry, dad.”

Dad: “Well, ‘sorry’ isn’t good enough! Don’t let it happen again. We’re done.”

What’s missing? The Gospel. It’s not only possible in a two-kingdom reality like the family to speak both Law and Gospel, it’s so important that failing to do so can even withhold eternal life. It can make a child angry and bitter. It can nullify his or her hearing of Jesus at church. A parent has the task of upholding honor and respect in the home for the well-being of the child and all concerned. But the parent is also a spiritual priest in the home with the responsibility of delivering forgiveness to a child — and conversely, asking for forgiveness from the child when harshness and anger dominate instead of measured discipline.

Run it like this:

Dad: “Are you sorry for what you’ve done?”

Kid: *Sniff.* “Yes, dad.”

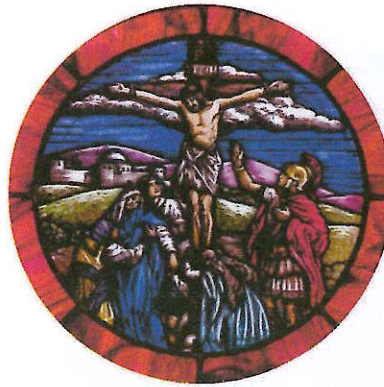
Dad: “I want you to know that I love you. And because I’m a Christian and a sinner forgiven daily by Jesus, I forgive you. Jesus forgives you. Never ever doubt my love for you. You are a precious gift from God. I want you to realize that in this life there are consequences for bad behavior, especially while you’re young, so you don’t get into really bad stuff later in life. Because I do love you, you’re grounded for this week.”

Forgive, parents! Ask for forgiveness! It’s your wonderful privilege to fill your “kingdom” at home with Christ and His love.

—Pastor Matthew C. Harrison

In early December, the U.S. Supreme Court heard a case concerning the Biden administration's challenge to Tennessee's ban on medical treatments for transgender minors. Though the court's decision will likely not be announced for a few months, the court's conservative justices seemed inclined to uphold the ban. If the ban is indeed upheld, the decision could protect similar laws in other states that ban gender transitioning medical procedures for minors and regulate sports competitions and bathroom use.

At the end of November, the British Parliament passed a bill legalizing "assisted dying" for terminally ill patients in England and Wales. Christians in the United Kingdom are deeply grieved by the decision, which shows the country's dramatic shift away from any regard for the sanctity of life. (Less than 10 years ago, in 2015, a similar bill was decisively defeated in Parliament). Christian leaders throughout the U.K., including the bishop of London, the archbishop of Westminster and leaders from many other Christian



denominations were all outspoken critics of the bill and are currently working to prevent the passed bill from becoming law.

Notre-Dame in Paris officially reopened on Dec. 7, 2024, a little over five years after a fire devastated the cathedral. A reopening ceremony was attended by around 50 heads of state and included performances by famous classical musicians, an address by French President Emmanuel Macron, prayers and singing. On Sunday morning, Dec. 8, Paris Archbishop Laurent Ulrich celebrated an inaugural Mass and consecrated the new altar. These ceremonies

reflect the uneasy position between church and state that the cathedral has long occupied. During the French Revolution, Notre-Dame was taken over from the Roman Catholic Church and rededicated as a "temple of reason"; to this day, the French Ministry of Culture retains the ownership of the building. Today, Notre-Dame is recognized much more as a national symbol of France, one of the most secular countries in Europe, than as a place where Christians have worshiped for a thousand years.

One of the most important archaeological discoveries of the 21st century concerning the Early Church — **the mosaic floor of a room Christians used for worship — is now on loan to the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C.,** where it will be displayed until July 6, 2025. The mosaic was discovered in 2005 in Megiddo, Israel, during construction work to expand a prison, where it remained for 20 years before being carefully moved for this exhibit. The mosaic contains several important inscriptions with clues into the daily life of the Early Church. One indicates that the mosaic was funded by a Roman centurion; another reads, "The god-loving Akeptous has offered the table to God Jesus Christ as a memorial" — demonstrating that from the earliest days of the church, Jesus was worshiped as God.

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Epiphany Traditions

King Cake & House Blessing

For month-by-month lists of Lutheran feasts, festivals and commemorations, visit lcms.org/worship/church-year.

IN A CULTURAL MILIEU that so easily distracts us from the Christian faith, many Christians ask: How do we order our lives outside of Sunday mornings in a distinctly Christian way?

Fortunately, we can find a helpful answer in the traditions of Lutheran liturgical living handed down over the centuries. Alongside the indispensable habits of attending services and holding devotions in the home, the church has passed down foods, activities and more for each season that engage all the senses and help Christians incorporate the faith into their everyday lives. As we move through the Church Year in the Divine Service, these at-home traditions help that faith sink deeply into our bodies and become part of our everyday confession, a confession not only in word but also in deed.

This year in *The Lutheran Witness*, we are going to take you through a month-by-month exploration of a few of the rich traditions that you may consider incorporating in your homelife.

The season of Epiphany begins on Jan. 6. In this season, Jesus' revelation is everywhere: We find the Babe to whom the nations bow; we hear the Father's word, "This is My Son," at His Baptism in the Jordan; we see the inauguration of His wonders as He turns water into wine. These themes reverberate through the church's traditions that accompany the season.

One of the most iconic foods we associate with Epiphany is King Cake, a pastry from the 12th century twisted in the symbolic shape of our Lord's crown. As befits a festive dessert, the sweet dough is enriched with butter and sugar and contains a special surprise! Traditionally, some trinket — a bean, coin or baby Jesus figurine — is discreetly inserted into the cake for one lucky eater to discover.

Another Epiphany tradition you may try this year is the house blessing. Ask your pastor to come over and bless each

room of your home with appropriate Scripture readings and prayers. This tradition sometimes includes chalking the doorpost with "20 + C + M + B + 25" (for this year). Some say the letters stand for the names of the Magi, but Lutherans often see a Christocentric meaning: *Christus Mansionem Benedicat* ("May Christ Bless the House"). Of course, this custom reminds us of a central focus of Epiphany: the Christ who loves mankind so much that He came to dwell among us. 🙏

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King Cake

Dough

- 1 cup warm milk
- 1 packet yeast
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 6 tablespoons melted butter, slightly cooled
- 3 eggs, separated
- 3–3 1/4 cups all-purpose flour

Filling

- 4 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon vanilla
- 1/2 cup brown sugar

Frosting

- 1 cup confectioners' sugar
- 2 tablespoons milk
- Toppings of choice (sprinkles, etc.)



Dissolve the yeast in the warm milk, then add the sugar, salt, butter, and two eggs plus one egg yolk. Reserve the remaining egg white. Add the flour and knead in a stand mixer for 10 min. Remove the dough and let rise in a greased bowl until doubled.

On parchment paper, roll out the dough into a rectangle and mix the filling ingredients. Spread the filling on the dough and fold the outer thirds over the middle third lengthwise. Cut the dough in half lengthwise, twist the strands together, and connect them at the ends to form a crown. Let it rise once more for 30 min.

Mix the reserved egg white with 1 tbsp water and brush over the bread. Bake at 350°F until golden, about 50 min. While waiting, mix the confectioners' sugar and milk together to make frosting. When the cake has cooled, decorate with the prepared frosting and top with sprinkles. Insert the trinket into the cake, slice and serve!