



Epistle



S T . J O H N L U T H E R A N C H U R C H

M A K I N G A N E W S T A R T – N O T J U S T F O R N E W Y E A R
A N Y M O R E

“Making a new start.” Is that the theme of the New Year? Or the theme of every time we get together in Church?

We are at the end of the year, and at the end of a decade. Part of the celebration of the New Year is to make resolutions. “I will exercise more regularly.” “I will eat healthier foods.” “I will spend more time with my family.” Each one is a worthy goal. And each one points to where we should be growing and what we should be turning away from. And it is a constant refrain that New Year’s resolutions might last almost the whole week. Such is the way of our human nature.

But that means that each resolution is a little taste of repentance; a little seeking to put to death the old Adam. It has to do with seeing ourselves as we are, with the stuff of the grave – and with the empty tomb. It’s a matter of dying and rising; and that means that our New Year’s resolutions have to do with the basic stuff of Christianity.

This is the same thing we share Sunday after Sunday, dying to sin and rising to new life in Jesus. It’s never the wrong time, and it’s never too late. It’s what we do. We’re Christians.

But we know that we cannot make new life start on our own or in our own power. It has to be given, and it has to come from someone who said about the old, “It is finished.” But look also into the Book of Revelation, chapter 21. There you find God saying, “Behold, I make all things new.” That includes you. So when we come together and we “speak together with God” (the word for “speak together with” is “confess”); we are saying that everything is starting over new in Jesus Christ.

Are we serious about that? Do we really believe that it is possible to start again new? Can people actually change? Well, God is serious about that. And God gives us the new beginning in Jesus: on the cross and on Easter; in our Baptism; and every Sunday through forgiveness of sins and the sweet Gospel. And not only does God believe that it is possible for people to change. He’s in the business of changing them. It’s what He does. He’s God.

So, with God leading us into the New Year and the New Decade, what do we want to look at as a congregation? What new beginnings is God leading us into this year? There are three things I want to set before you at the beginning of this year:

1. Tithers of St. John – This is an idea begun by one of our Congregation’s Officers. You will be hearing more about it in the month of January. It has to do with Stewardship. Very simply, we need to begin talking more freely about what tithing is. And there are a number of members of our congregation who are ready and willing to make a commitment to tithing, because they want to be involved that much in the work of God’s Kingdom and in bringing the Gospel to our community and to the whole world.
2. To be like Barnabas – The name Barnabas means Son of Encouragement. Barnabas is the one who brought Paul into the Church at Jerusalem. After Paul had persecuted the Church, and had been involved in the martyr ing of Stephen and many others, he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul became a Christian and began to witness to his faith in Jesus Christ. But the Christians were still afraid to trust him.

Barnabas is the one who stepped in, encouraged Paul, told others of his genuine faith, and brought him into the congregation. Later, Barnabas brought Paul into the work at Antioch, the congregation that sent them on the f irst Great Missionary Journey. Then Barnabas spoke up for John Mark, and in many other ways encouraged his f ellow believers.

He was one who could look deeply at a fellow Christian and find the good things about their faith, and about what God was doing in their life. We have been learning about Barnabas in our 6 am Wednesday Bible Class; and about what an impact this kind of encouragement can have on our fellow Christians. I believe it is a good idea to take that pattern of Christian discipleship and share it among one another in our whole congregation of St. John Lutheran Church.

3. “Coming Home to God” – There are many among us who have wandered. They are your friends, family members, and fellow members of our congregation. It’s because this world is full of temptations. They lead us away. And it is full of troubles. They distract us from the spiritual life. We need to call out, and we need to carry this message:

Whatever has distracted you from God, whatever has troubled your soul, whatever joys or sorrows . . . God is calling. He is calling you. He is calling your neighbor. He is calling your family member. “Come on home.” Life just isn’t right without God. He gives the only peace that endures through the troubles. He gives the only joy that measures up far better than anything else in this life. He really does restore the soul. So He is calling you and He is saying “come on home.”

These are the things that I want to set before you as a congregation this year. May God bless our work together in the New Year and New Decade.

Pastor Mark 1 Corinthians 2:2

My dear friends in Christ,

I bid you a warm welcome as we enter now into the New Year with wondrous anticipation of what it may bring! We need not search far for the news of gloom and doom on the horizon that many are considering in their predictions of the New Year. And yet as the country and the world appear to be in such turmoil, let us rejoice in the Word of God, as He gives us.

St. Paul must have seen signs of the Philippians’ in their struggles with a world in turmoil. He told them, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

It is so easy for a world, blind to the purpose of Christ in its fallen state, to look at the Word of the Christmas message, only to find its meaning hollow. We, as Christians having just celebrated His birth, share an insight into the joy of salvation for which He brought.

While tomorrow or the coming year may bring uncertainties for this world, we recognize that the certainty of what our Lord brings, will offer much more.

The apostle, St. Paul, had come from a world that saw little purpose for a Savior. His role as a Jewish leader had been to persecute those who had found purpose of a Savior. In irony of that fact, God calls upon Paul to preach the Gospel. He would face the threat of uncertainty and persecution himself. Yet in light of this persecution he faced, he calls upon the strength of God’s Word to see him through.

He reminds the Philippians and us, that when troubled or anxious about what is to be, God’s peace and understanding are at the heart of the message that the Savior brings through the Word. May you find that peace and understanding as we approach the year to come in the joy that He has brought us!

Matthew 6: 25-27; 33

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Vicar Gail Heimgartner

**O U R 2 0 0 9 Y E A R - T O - D A T E F I N A N C I A L S T A T U S
A S O F 1 2 / 2 9 / 0 9**

	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Income	\$1,093,026.39	\$983,554.53	(\$109,471.86)
Expense	\$1,093,026.36	\$1,052,014.96	\$41,011.40
Income/Expense		(\$68,460.43)	
Debt (Line of Credit)	\$96,480.00	Mortgage	\$55,210.26
Average Attendance per Week:	323		

Your church needs your help. Please prayerfully consider what you can do to help this situation.

**O V E R C O M I N G T H E F E A R O F C A U S I N G
C O N F R O N T A T I O N**

You have likely heard the saying, "You should never discuss religion, politics or sex in polite company." Why is that? Although there is much debate circling these topics, few would argue that all of the above are hot topics. People are sensitive about these issues and, on some points, for good reason.

However, the underlying fear that hinders many Christians from witnessing is upsetting the apple cart or disturbing social etiquette. But while social tradition tells us to steer clear of all of these topics, God calls Christians to go out and actively discuss this "taboo" topic of religion. So how do we do so effectively in a culture that says, "don't"?

Although we want to consider the most effective means for communicating our message so others listen rather than constructing a wall, we cannot allow the concern of confrontation - for social "correctness" - to keep us from sharing altogether. God is not concerned with social correctness. He is concerned with the eternity of His children. And, He calls us to be concerned with their eternity as well - not with being polite.

If we are to follow in Christ's footsteps, we should consider His actions during His ministry. Did He avoid confrontation? No. Was His personal mission to avoid stirring the pot, as many of us have adopted? No. His mission was to spread the Gospel: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel!" (Mark 1:15). His mission was to see people repent and be reunited with God. This ministry of reconciliation should also be our mission. The wonderful thing, however, is that God would not send us into a battlefield alone. He does not send us out there to be attacked or to engage in fruitless communication.

In fact, He says, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11). God would not send us out to share His word only to do so in vain. He is equally concerned with the lost receiving and understanding His message. This is why He tells us to always be prepared to share the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15). And He tells us to do so with gentleness and respect.

We should not avoid sharing our faith for fear of confrontation ensuing. Instead we should pray for and consider ways to communicate the message of salvation effectively to avoid confrontation. There are both spiritual and practical ways to do so.

Provided by Sarah Guldalian; November 2009 edition, Equipping Newsletter; Lutheran Hour Ministries.

N E W F A C I L I T Y

Have you seen the wonderful sign on the school lawn? As of Dec. 18, the New Facility Fund has grown to \$251,866.63. Although the fund is inching toward our goal, we need everyone to chip in a little every month, every pay day, every birthday, or whatever you feel God is urging you to do. A new school with extra space and new, safe, long-lasting construction can be more than a dream. Join the few faithful donors in helping this dream become a reality for God's little children in our community. Take advantage of a year-end tax deduction and write a check today.

2 0 1 0 S I D M E N ' S R E T R E A T

The Southern Illinois district is hosting a district wide men's retreat at Camp Wartburg. The theme for the retreat is "Be Strong . . . and of Good Courage" centered on the first chapter of the book of Joshua. It is a great opportunity to share with others and enrich ourselves.

It is an overnight event starting Friday evening, Jan 15 and concluding Saturday evening Jan 16. The cost is \$35 per person.

Agenda

Friday

- 6:30 Registration
- 7:00 Intro / Ice breakers
- 7:30 Opening Devotions
- 8:15 Keynote Speaker
- 9:00 Snacks / Campfire / Fellowship

Saturday

- 8:00 Breakfast
- 8:45 Bible Study
- 9:30 "Manly Adventure" (caving, rock climbing, zip line)
- Noon Lunch
- 12:45 Open time for congregational groups to meet
- 2:00 Servant Project
- 4:30 Bible Study
- 5:30 Evening Meal
- 6:30 Closing Worship / Sending
- 7:00 Depart Camp Wartburg

For more information on the event, you can contact Camp Wartburg (phone: 618-939-7715, email: wartburg@htc.net). The registration deadline is January 8. If you are interested in going, just turn your money into the church office and we will send one check in for the event.

This is a good opportunity to make friendships both within our church and with others from around the district. Hope to see you there.

S C H O O L C R O S S

We have had the cross looked at and the decision has been made to replace the current cross. We have received \$2,000.00 in donations. We will need to collect another \$4,000.00 to complete this renovation. Thank you to all who have made a contribution to the cross repair.





ACOLYTES

Friday January 1 10:00 a.m. Kara Mehrer & David Downey
 Sat January 2 6:30 p.m. Matthew Meyers & Katy Fricke
 Sun January 3 7:45 a.m. Nicholas Rinehart & Stormie Zweigart
 10:00 a.m. Mallory Westerman & Krista Downey
 Sat January 9 6:30 p.m. Deanna Hohgreffe & Ellen Blechle
 Sun January 10 7:45 a.m. Alyse Bollman & Jared Johnson
 10:00 a.m. Lacey Reynolds & Christopher Lang
 Sat January 16 6:30 p.m. Caleb Golding & Sydney Levan
 Sun January 17 7:45 a.m. Jaclyn Colvis & Matt Smith (Meade)
 10:00 a.m. Sarah Hecht & Matthew Smith (Smith)
 Sat January 23 6:30 p.m. Alyssa Hoops & Megan Brockmeyer
 Sun January 24 7:45 a.m. Miranda Mueller & Lindsay Hammel
 10:00 a.m. Ashley Wagner & Jacob Lochhead
 Sat January 30 6:30 p.m. Katelyn Rader & Deanna Hohgreffe
 Sun January 31 7:45 a.m. Matt Smith (Meade) & Madison Kueker
 10:00 a.m. Tyler Redeker & Austin Redeker

GREETERS

Friday January 1 10:00 a.m. Volunteer
 Sat January 2 6:30 p.m. Barb Tindall
 Sun January 3 7:45 a.m. Edna Neislein
 10:00 a.m. Marilyn Ehlers
 Sat January 9 6:30 p.m. Tammy Crawford
 Sun January 10 7:45 a.m. Nancy Guebert
 10:00 a.m. Shirley Roth
 Sat January 16 6:30 p.m. Mary Webster
 Sun January 17 7:45 a.m. Linda Sympton
 10:00 a.m. Donna Young
 Sat January 23 6:30 p.m. Angie Welge
 Sun January 24 7:45 a.m. Darlene Gentsch
 10:00 a.m. Louise Liefer
 Sat January 30 6:30 p.m. Karen Miller
 Sun January 31 7:45 a.m. Tammy Grah
 10:00 a.m. Kathy Sprengel

USHERS TEAMS

Friday January 1 10:00 a.m. Gary Eggemeyer
 Sat January 2 6:30 p.m. Volunteer
 Sun January 3 7:45 a.m. Gary Duensing
 10:00 a.m. Don Stallman
 Sat January 9 6:30 p.m. Volunteer
 Sun January 10 7:45 a.m. Roger Kattenbraker
 10:00 a.m. Gary Eggemeyer
 Sat January 16 6:30 p.m. Volunteer
 Sun January 17 7:45 a.m. Don Gentsch
 10:00 a.m. Rick Casten
 Sat January 23 6:30 p.m. Volunteer
 Sun January 24 7:45 a.m. Ron Rathert
 10:00 a.m. Randy Campbell
 Sat January 30 6:30 p.m. Volunteer
 Sun January 31 7:45 a.m. Gary Duensing
 10:00 a.m. Don Stallman

RADIO

January 1 Chris Urquhart
 January 3 Steve Egge
 January 10 Richard Janssen
 January 17 Mardell Granger
 January 24 Tim Lochhead
 January 31 Dallas Redeker



ALTAR GUILD

Wanda Dethrow
 Joe & Ruby Schirmer
 Lynette Colvis
 Melvin & Edna Neislein
 Pam Sheely
 Larry & Imogene McDonough
 Allan & Dorothy Witbart

ALUMINUM CANS

December 28 - January 2 Gary Knop
 January 4 - January 16 Steve Young
 January 18 - January 23 Larry McDonough
 January 25 - January 30 Gary Knop



CHURCH E-MAIL

Pastor Willig— pastorwillig@stjohnchester.com
 Vicar Gail Heimgartner— vicar@stjohnchester.com
 Kelly Walls— secretary@stjohnchester.com



O U R F E L L O W S H I P C L U B

We would like to thank the many whose donations to the Children's Christmas gifts made a very substantial blessing for their gifts this year. May the Joy of this season be a continual one for you all throughout the New Year.

C O N T R I B U T I O N S T A T E M E N T S

Contribution statements will be available by January 31, 2010. Please sign the tablet in the Fellowship Area of the church or call the church office if you would like your statement mailed to you.



T I M E A N D T A L E N T

Please return to the church office your Time and Talent sheets that were included in the November Epistle Thanks

P I C T U R E D I R E C T O R Y

There is still time to sign up to have your picture taken for the new Church Directory. Our Directory will not be complete without you. Call the Church office or sign up on the church website.



St. John Ev. Lutheran Church
302 W. Holmes Street
Chester, Illinois 62233

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