

THE LUTHERAN CONNECTION



NEWS OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCHES OF THE TORONTO CONFERENCE

NOVEMBER 2011

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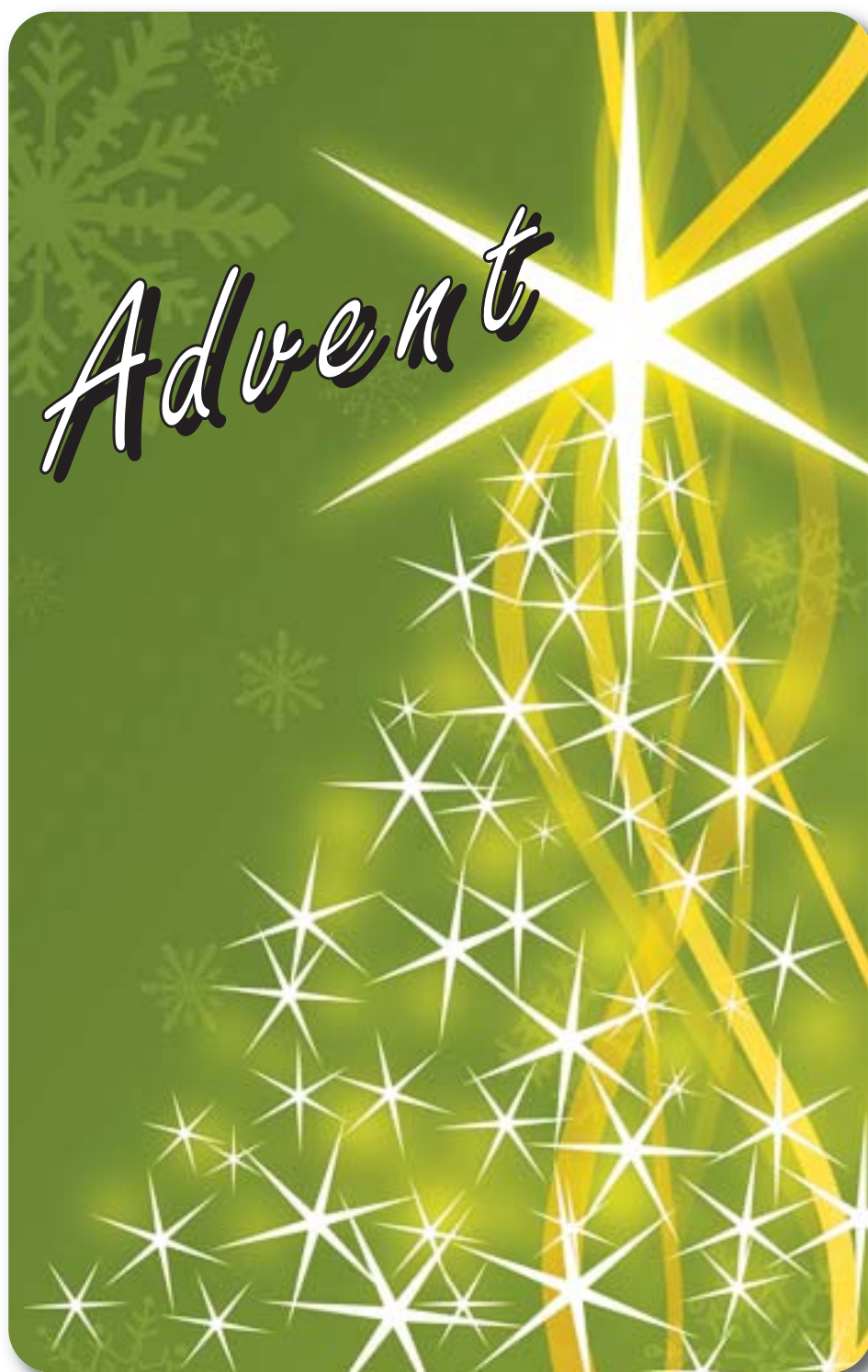
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Included with this issue is the notice for contributions to support the Toronto Conference in 2012. Please pass it on to your congregational treasurer.

Please check the Toronto Conference website for the following items:

- Updated Toronto Conference Prayer Rotation
- Toronto Conference Choir Music Library

www.toronto.easternsynod.org



Our Pastors Comment

Pastor Roy Thakurdyal Bethesda, Unionville

Growing one's relationship with God is an intentional action. It happens in a context of disciplined personal devotional life; reading the Bible, prayers and meditation. Relationship with God is nurtured on word and sacrament in public worship. Relationship with God grows as relationship with God's people is strengthened in the fellowship of believers. As relationship with the Lord grows and strengthens, so does commitment to and relationship with the church. Obviously the two are intertwined. In this context, experience of church becomes interesting, meaningful and exciting.

One can have a relationship with the church and not necessarily a warm and personal relationship with the Lord. This leads to nominal and tenuous church membership and their logical consequences, i.e. spiritual neglect, indifference to church membership and disconnect with the life of the church. However, it is inconceivable that one can have a warm and personal relationship with the Lord and not with his body, the church. Therefore, the quality of your church experience depends on the quality of your relationship with the Lord. The task and responsibility of every Christian are to nurture their relationship with the Lord.

Pastor Christian Schweter First Lutheran, Toronto

"Earth to earth, ashes to ashes and dust to dust", then we all started singing this Easter hymn. Neither death nor the darkness of grief, nor the impermanence of the flesh have the last word. The last word is: "Christ is Risen". That is the end of death, grief and mortality. This was proclaimed at the graves. Instead of looking at the grave and death people lifted their weeping eyes to heaven and to Him who is their hope: Jesus Christ, who overcame death and who opened the way to God the Father in heaven.

It is not that there is no more sorrow or grief. It is not that there are no more tears. It is not that we do not sometimes doubt the might of death. But still it is true that Christ triumphed in life and that we go with him to new life. That is our hope. That is why we proclaim the victory of Christ over death at the grave of our loved ones.

Pastor Mark van House Peace, Pickering

Every year we celebrate our birthdays. Whether quietly or with festivities (or those who only note it to themselves) another year is acknowledged. In the church we celebrate the birth of Jesus with Christmas.

Among Lutherans we recognize that November 10 is the birthday of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther. On Sunday the 13th we'll celebrate his life and works with readings from Table Talk at the first worship service and theological accounts at the second service. We hope you will join us for one or both services as we look at what Luther's words and works have meant to the church more than 500 years since his birth.

Pastor Claudine Carlson Interim, St. Philip's, Toronto

However, the enduring message of the "Protestant Reformation" is that Christ's Church is ever *reforming* ... we never "arrive". We must always be alert to the Spirit's call to renewal, and be open to fresh ways of worshiping and serving. It was hardly a new idea; the ancient psalmist implored us to "sing new songs to the Lord", and it has ever been thus. Is it easy to be in "perpetual motion" as a pilgrim people always on the move, always changing? Absolutely not. But is it *necessary*? Absolutely, as well. Our call as followers of Jesus is to live in that tension between honouring the past (the "tradition") and being open to the new future God is preparing. *That's* what Reformation Sunday is really about.

Rev. Martha Tatarnic St. David's, Orillia

This is the irony: the more we use social networking as a means to connect, the more isolated we feel. The new studies are discouraging. There is a distinct correlation between social networking and heightened rates of depression, feelings of alienation and overall dissatisfaction with life. We want it so badly that we are willing to invest each and every spare minute into the construction of our on-line life, and yet what we seek gets further and further from our grasp. Which raises the question – the question for social theorists, philosophers, journalists, as well as Christians who believe passionately that God has something to say in the face of the world's alienation and hurt – how is it possible to be simultaneously so connected and also so disconnected?

The clearest answer is that having a relationship with at least two computer screens between you is simply not the same. We applaud social networking because of its ability to transcend geography, to bring people together, even if oceans or continents divide them. But it turns out that physical space actually matters: unplanned breaks in conversation, uncertain fidgeting, the awkward and enlivening chemistry of bodies interacting. Social networking bypasses that, twitter or Facebook has the definite advantage of smoothing out our oftentimes clumsy attempts at relating. It turns out that the clumsiness is missed.

Rev. Tuula Van Gaasbeek Agricola, Toronto

The past few months have been filled with troubling natural events: earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods. For some of my friends in the USA, the first flood from Hurricane Irene was described as a 500-year event. Think of it – the Reformation itself is not 500 years old. If this were not enough, the "rain" (so to

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speak) keeps falling in our personal lives. I was called to officiate at three funerals in a period of six days. Many of our members have had big surgery. More of you are having medical tests or know of someone who is. While the concerns mount, it is safe to say that recent rainy days have not helped.

Major events like these leave us feeling disoriented, dazed, and even confused, uncertain of our schedule, our life, or what we should do next. These are normal human emotions. In some ways, they are more normal than the ease and complacency we feel when things are going well for us – at least we know they have been around for a long time.

Pastor Brian Wilker-Frey St. Ansgar, Toronto

By my calculations, just under 25% of us participate on any given Sunday at St. Ansgar. So far this year, our weekly attendance sits at just below 70 during the “regular” months – I didn’t include the months of July and August in my calculations; that would have been too depressing. Also, these numbers assume that everyone worshipping on Sunday is a member of St. Ansgar, which, of course, they are not. Confirmation Sunday and baptisms bring in many guests and each Sunday includes its share of friends and visitors from out of town. I would guess that the actual figure of participating members on a given Sunday is closer to 20% – one in five.

Now, there are lots of very good reasons for this and I’m not trying to make people feel guilty. But the trend is troubling and there are also very good reasons for turning it around.

Last year at this time I suggested that there are three fundamental ways to create a vibrant and exciting congregation: 1. Tithing. 2. Regular participation in continuing education. 3. Regular worship attendance. At that time I dealt specifically with tithing (for more information on tithing, see my article in the November 2010 edition of *Family*

Doings and “How’s Your Tithing Going?” in this edition). The idea was to encourage a small increase in *proportional giving of our offerings* each year. I’m wondering if each of us could think about increasing the *proportional giving of our time* each year, too.

Pastor Carey Meadows- Helmer, Interim, Epiphany, Toronto

Leading up to Stewardship Sunday, my article for November is a reflection upon *stewardship*, or more fittingly, about being a *steward* of God’s abundant gifts. All of us are stewards of God’s generous gifts in our lives. God gives; humanity receives these blessings; and we are able to be a blessing to others. What comes to mind is that being a good or bad steward is so very much about *relationship*. Life is all about relationships, isn’t it? We have relationships with each other, we have relationships with creation, and we have a relationship with money. Relationships with people take priority above the others, but each of these relationships are inextricably linked. Our stewardship of money and creation have a direct impact on our relationships with each other. We are either good stewards, bad stewards or somewhere in between. The good news is that there is always room to grow. Through each of these relationships we live out our calling to be good stewards of what God has entrusted to us; the gifts of time, talent and treasures.

Pastor Dennis Becker Faith, Oshawa

We journey from Christ the King at one end of the eschatological spectrum to a point prior to the king’s incarnation. Advent is the season we await the coming of God’s answer. We anticipate the work of God’s salvation; we listen to the prophets foretell of his coming. We watch the stirrings among the people as God sets the plan in motion. All this with an eye to the day when the future king will return in triumph and glory. Jesus is coming. Hold on.

We live in a time of now but not yet. God’s answer has come, has triumphed. We live in God’s kingdom. Yet the full glory has yet to appear. Through the Holy Spirit we get glimpses of what is to come; we are assured of God’s ultimate victory over evil.

Pastor Linda Douglas Zion, Maple

In a spirit of prayer and learning, Christians continue to have their perspectives on family and marriage challenged by Word and Sacrament. This includes God calling us and prodding us toward a faithful life in all circumstances. Traditionally, marriage has meant a commitment of one man and one woman. The church now faces the reality that same-sex couples can be legally married in Canada and in some other countries. Marriage provides community support, including legal protections for spouses and children; this support and protection are a need for both same-sex and opposite-sex couples.

Our church is conflicted on how to acknowledge covenants of fidelity made by same-sex couples. While acknowledging same-sex couples is troubling to some members of this church, failure to acknowledge these covenants of fidelity is troubling to others. At this moment in time, this church is being called in the spirit of St. Paul (Galatians 2) to respect and to allow space for varied understanding and practices. We pray for the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit as we seek to support couples who enter into a lifelong commitment of fidelity to one another in marriage.

Pastor Karen Jenkins Christ, Peterborough

It is a fearful thing to embrace change. It means shaking things up and doing things that are different. That’s why change is hard to keep up. We may start out fine but, when anxiety sets in, we usually run back to what we know instead of working through the change to reach the other end of the tunnel. You’ve heard the old adage, “don’t fix it if it

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ain't broke". Well, as Pastor Mark told us, it's very broke. If our church stays the way it is, we will join the 30% of churches that are on a respirator.

Jesus Christ scared a lot of people because he ushered in change. He healed on the Sabbath, accepted women as equal, touched the unclean, healed and loved all unconditionally. What Jesus did for us on the cross changed us forever: the way we think and the way we act. Jesus coming into the world was all about re-forming us to the will of God and empowering us to accept change in our lives so we can change the lives of others. We are continually called to live out the Reformation in ourselves and in the church until the day that God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Christ promises to be with us each step of the way to give us strength and courage to embrace the change necessary to make it happen.

Pastor Susan Climo Peace, Mississauga

"We're not renewing your lease. We need your space back."

Those words hit me with the force of a wrecking ball. I heard them on October 27, at a meeting with the manager of Square One. They were followed by lots of other words, well-crafted marketing words: words about "significant reinvestment" in the mall, about "elevating the experience" in the soon-to-be-expanded food court (which will include what is now our beloved worship and gathering space, being used in this new mall design as pantries or sculleries for additional food court outlets), about making Square One a "premier shopping destination". But the words that kept pounding in my head and crushing my heart were the ones that meant, as of April 30, 2012, Peace Lutheran Church will no longer be the Church at Square One.

Dazed, I slowly walked back from the management offices to the church. I sat down in the front row, looked up at the

beautiful stained glass behind the altar, and cried as I talked to God. "What now, God? What are we going to do now?" My tear-stained prayer was interrupted by a knock on the glass at the church's main door; two women asked if they could come in to look around, and spend a few quiet moments. "Of course," I replied. Then I silently thought "well, thanks God, there's lesson number one: you're calling us to be fully present here, wholly your church in this place, until the very last moment we are not...we still have work to do here."

So that is what we will do – we will continue to be God's Church at Square One in the days and weeks and months to come, right up to the end of April 2012.

Pastor Ann Krueger Westside, Barrie

I'm sure you've heard me talk about having a grateful heart – that it's the centre of our response to all God does for us. It's the right response, the appropriate response – in fact, a life-giving response. I see nodding heads when I talk about it on Sunday. I suspect that you nod your heads for you, too, have experienced the joy and wonder of God's love and care.

This moment of gratitude will probably dim a bit, for life will get busy. That's why we need each other – to help remind each other to be grateful – by sharing our stories of how God has helped us. That gives us hope when we're in the midst of life's trials and tribulations.

A grateful heart is one that overflows – it makes us want to share our joy with

others. It generates enthusiasm and the next thing we know, we're volunteering at church and in the community, enjoying a sense of fulfillment from being one of God's helpers.

A grateful heart even helps us to open our wallets. Having experienced God's love and care, we want to be part of God's work in our church and community. Having experienced God's love and care, instead of being scared about sharing the money we have, we really start to understand that God is the source of our financial gifts. All the ways that money comes to us – through the ability to earn a living or make investments, etc. – come with God's blessing. And God gives us these blessings so that we can be his partners.

Pastor Nadine Nicholds Augsburg, Brampton

Now, in 2011, our welcoming process has reached its pinnacle. On September 20, 2011, Augsburg's congregational council affirmed the policies of the ELCIC. What this means for Augsburg is that the pastors, present and future, will be able to offer the full range of pastoral care, including marriage, to anyone; with the same standards and equal pastoral concern and sensitivity toward all.

Our Affirmation of Welcome states, "...in faithfulness to the Gospel and our Lutheran heritage, and to the best of our abilities, we promise to provide programs, ministries, and pastoral care to all who seek God in this place." Now we can move ahead to make real the full expression of this statement. ♦



Ecumenical Events

■ **Westside, Barrie**, is hosting a Taizé service on November 25.

■ The choir from **Faith, Oshawa**, will take part in an ecumenical Christmas concert at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church on December 11. Seven choirs are participating in this event. ♦

Our Congregations at Work

■ **Westside, Barrie**, held a Family Worship Sunday on November 13 where they prepared for Advent by making an Advent calendar with devotional readings for each day in Advent.

■ On November 20, **Agricola, Toronto**, presented a concert *Oi muis-tatko...* in honour of the congregation's 80th anniversary.

■ **Christ the King-Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thornhill**, is holding its Annual Christmas Bazaar on November 26.

■ **Christ the King-Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thornhill**, is holding Lunch and Learn session on the topic of Holy Communion Sundays November 6, 20, 27 and December 4.

■ **Christ the King-Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thornhill**, held its annual Lantern Walk on November 4.

■ The Sunday School at **Christ the King-Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thornhill**, is planning a play date for May 2012 with the Yellow Brick House. It is a facility where abused children and women find shelter and help. They are currently fundraising for supplies.

■ Members of **Christ the King-Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thornhill**, met on November 12 to prepare 50 We Care kits for CLWR.

■ **Bethesda, Unionville**, held its annual Sharecropper Dinner on November 13.

■ On Reformation Sunday, **Bethesda, Unionville**, unveiled a statue of Martin Luther donated by one of its families.

■ The women at **Bethesda, Unionville**, are preparing We Care kits for CLWR.

■ Bishop Michael Pryse and Bishop George Elliott will visit **St. David's, Orillia**, on November 27.

■ **St. David's, Orillia**, is holding its Mistletoe Luncheon, Bake and Craft Sale on November 26.

■ **St. David's, Orillia**, will hold its Advent Café on December 10.

■ **St. David's, Orillia**, is holding Advent Prayer on Wednesday mornings and Tuesday evenings during Advent.

The sessions will be focused around *Lectio Divina – Praying with Scripture*.

■ On November 1, the Jubilee Chorale held a concert at **St. David's, Orillia**, with a portion of the proceeds going to St. David's Breakfast Program.

■ On November 6, **St. Andrew's Latvian, Toronto**, screened "Souvenirs – Healing after War." The film covers stories on the homecoming from war as told by several generations of veterans.

■ Members of **St. Andrew's Latvian, Toronto**, held a Gingerbread Baking Busy Bee on October 31, and November 1 and 8.

■ **Peace, Pickering**, celebrated Martin Luther's birthday on November 13 with an *Apfel Strudel Kaffee Uhr* and a potluck German Luncheon.

■ The women at **Peace, Pickering**, are holding their Advent Dinner on December 5.

■ Members of **St. Philip's, Toronto**, will hold a Lunch and Learn on November 27 to discuss CLWR.

■ **St. Philip's, Toronto**, members are knitting various items for their Mitten Tree.

■ **St. Philip's, Toronto**, held a Jazz Eucharist on November 20.

■ The Young at Heart group at **St. Ansgar, Toronto**, were entertained with a travelogue at their November 9 meeting.

■ **St. Ansgar, Toronto**, is holding its 85th Anniversary fellowship dinner on November 25. The dinner will feature a video or oral histories and archive displays.

■ Children from **St. Ansgar, Toronto**, from five to eight years old are joining the children of St. Paul's Mandarin for a drawing class.

■ Members of **Peace, Mississauga**, will adopt a family for Christmas donations.

■ Seniors at **Peace, Mississauga**, will hold a craft sale November 25 and 26.

■ **Peace, Mississauga**, will celebrate its anniversary service and a potluck luncheon on December 4.

■ **Peace, Mississauga**, has been informed by Square One Mall that they will not be renewing their current lease which expires on April 30, 2012. The members ask for our prayers as they discern what God is calling them to do as they move on.

■ Jeff Pym was guest speaker at **Epiphany, Toronto's**, annual stewardship Sunday on November 13.

■ The ELW at **Epiphany, Toronto**, is holding its annual bazaar on November 26.

■ Members of **Faith, Oshawa**, are holding a "Sugar and Spice" event on November 27. Participants are asked to bring favourite (and best) sugar and/or spice dishes for everyone to sample.

■ Members of **Faith, Oshawa**, are studying the Gospel of Luke at their Bible studies.

■ On November 24, **Faith, Oshawa**, will hold a "Pint with the Pastor" evening.

■ Members of **Faith, Oshawa**, are preparing We Care kits this Christmas.

■ Pastor Karen Jenkins, **Christ, Peterborough**, has accepted a call to St. Luke's, Ridgeway, effective January 1.

■ Pastor Beth Wagschal led a two-part series on prayer at **Christ, Peterborough**.

■ **Christ, Peterborough**, held a blood pressure clinic on November 20. ♦



Youth

■ Youth at **Westside, Barrie**, are creating an outdoor wooden nativity scene for the church.

■ Youth at **Faith, Oshawa**, held a "Yuk Night" on November 18.

■ On December 10, the youth at **St. David's, Orillia**, will hold an evening of pizza, goodies and favourite Christmas movies. ♦

