

## FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH

*Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

Ministers: All God's People at FLC

Hank French, Pastor

# FIRST



*“Servants of All”*

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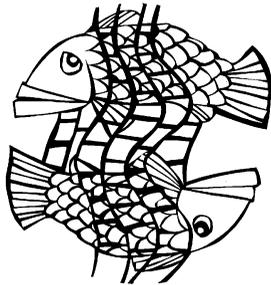
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February 2020, Newsletter

February 5, 2020

### Season of Epiphany



Epiphany means “manifestation.” In the church year, we celebrate the Epiphany of Our Lord on January 6. On this day we celebrate the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles—that is, to all nations, as the Magi are led to Bethlehem by the light of the star.

In the weeks that follow, this year through the Sundays of January and ending on Transfiguration Sunday, February 23, the scripture texts reveal Jesus as the beloved Son of God as he is baptized in the waters of the Jordan. Through this epiphany, Jesus fulfills all righteousness and becomes the servant of God who will be a light to the nations. In the waters of baptism, we are anointed by the Spirit, and are named God's beloved children.

Jesus then begins his public ministry by calling the fishermen to leave their nets and follow him. In Jesus the kingdom of God has come near. We who have walked in darkness have seen a great light. Light dawns for us as we gather around the word, the font, and the holy table. Listen for light images in the weeks of Epiphany: “I will give you as a light to the nations” Isaiah 49:6, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” Isaiah 9:2, “You are the light of the world” and “Let your light shine” Matthew 5:14-16. By this epiphany we are sent to share the good news that others may be caught in the net of God's grace and mercy.

**Pastor Hank's Article**  
*see page 2*

**Lenten News**  
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**Adult Opportunities**  
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**Annual Report  
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## Notes from Pastor Hank

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January has come and gone, but the two snowiest months of the year are yet to be lived through! May those of you who have headed to warmer places for the winter know that you are missed in the frigid northland and we wish you a safe and happy time away from Little Falls. For those of you who remain in Minnesota—stay safe and enjoy this winter wonderland.

A quick update on our search for a new pastor to guide First Lutheran into the future God is calling us to. The Church Council has been in an interview process with a potential candidate for a term-contract call to serve First Lutheran. Due to the confidentiality of all call processes I can't go into the details, but I can tell you that it looks like the Council will be considering moving forward in a different direction. A discussion of whether to seek another term contract candidate or to go the way of a traditional call process will be on the agenda of the next Council meeting. Please pray for the Council as they continue to discern the direction God would have us go. Again, if you have any questions or concerns, please talk to Council President Barb Stumpf, any of the other Council members, or me.

And with the mention of Barb's name, I am reminded that she is headed to the Holy Land on February 6<sup>th</sup> for a three-week tour. Pray that she travels well and safely to and from that troubled part of the world and that her time walking where Jesus walked will be spiritually invigorating for her. She returns on Ash Wednesday. Until then, if you have anything to discuss with the Council, feel free to contact the Council vice-president, Carl Rydeen.

Before February gives way to March, we will enter Lent, that time of year when we focus our attention on the "passion" of Jesus and what it all means for us. It is a contemplative time of the year, an introspective time of the year, a time when we wonder about our faith and take seriously its implications for the way we do life. I invite and encourage you to attend our Wednesday night

Lenten worship. Our theme this year will be the "seven last words of Christ" spoken, according to the four Gospels, on the cross where he died. Come early for the Soup Supper, enjoy conversation with friends, and then enter the sanctuary to contemplate the "passion" of Jesus and its meaning for each of us.

Wherever you are—North, South or West in Hawaii!—may you daily experience the peace of Christ.

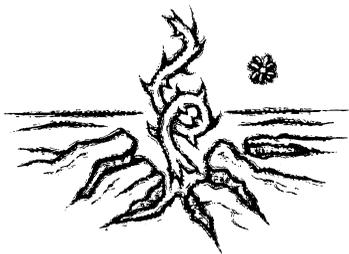
### *Pastor Hank*

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#### **Prayer Ventures**

During Sunday worship in February we will hear from several well-known passages from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel. These passages may offer an opportunity to consider who and what we pray for. In our private prayer time we may pray primarily for the people and situations that we care about the most. The Sunday prayers of intercession serve to help us pray more deeply and widely than we might on our own. There are many resources available for prayer. The ELCA website contains many resources for prayer, go to: [elca.org](http://elca.org) and find resources for ways to pray, prayer in congregations, prayers both classic, new and topical, readings on prayer, ways to jump start your prayer life, and much more. You can find printed resources in the church library. We also have available at church a monthly resource for daily prayer concerns from the ELCA called Prayer Ventures which suggests a topic for each day. You can also find this resource online at: <https://www.elca.org/Resources/Prayer-Ventures#2020>.





## Lent 2020

**begins on Ash Wednesday, February 26  
at First Lutheran Church**

**Soup Supper served at 5:30 p.m.**

**7:00 p.m. Worship with Holy Communion  
and Imposition of Ashes**

With ash and soot we begin the Lenten season with confession; we begin with Psalm 51. Today this ancient prayer placed on our lips becomes new again: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions."

As we confess our unfaithfulness to God, our lackluster love for our neighbors, our neglect of suffering and injustice in the world, we ask God to wash us, to purge us, to create in us clean

**Lord, make us instruments of your peace.**

**Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.**

**Amen.**

*Adapted from Evangelical Lutheran Worship, pg. 87,  
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## Council Highlights

- ✦ Council expressed thanks to outgoing members Dale Gohl, Jerry Neumann, Kerry Olson, and Bob O'Neill for their service.
- ✦ Council requests continued prayer for outgoing member Dale Gohl as he receives treatment at the University of Minnesota.
- ✦ Council continues to work with the NE MN Synod in the process of filling the congregation's pastoral vacancy. Grateful thanks to Pastor Hank French who is serving the congregation as Bridge Pastor during this time.

## Worship Serving Opportunities Signup for 2020

Each Sunday, many worshipers come to worship at First Lutheran. Your servant hands are an integral part of providing hospitality to all who enter here. Stop at the table in the Gathering Space to offer your gifts in service to Christ's body at First Lutheran. Serving areas are greeters, ushers, scripture readers, communion ministry, child care, coffee hospitality. You can sign up for a time that fits your schedule. Sign up now for February. Training for each serving ministry is available—please ask in the church office!

We will devote space in the newsletter in the coming months with information about the various serving ministries. You may want to try something new!

Signup sheets are posted now. Thanks for being *First...Servants of All.*

### *Communion Preparation, Setup and Cleanup*

The gathered people of God celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion each week. The food needed for the sacramental meal is placed on the table so that the gathered assembly may see the full sign of the feast it is to share. We give thanks and proclaim God's promise in conjunction with the use of this bread and wine.

## Adult Opportunities

### Ministry Team Opportunities

The community of faith at First Lutheran has many opportunities for folks in the congregation to be involved. Leadership roles were recently filled by election at the congregational annual meeting (*see the abbreviated annual report on pages 5 and 6*). Adult members are also encouraged to be involved with the seven ministry teams that keep mission and ministry strong and vibrant here. The seven teams areas are: Worship and Music, Education, Youth, Mission, Congregational Life, Facilities and Property, and Health. Consider whether you can share time and talent by serving on one of the teams. Please pray for the teams and the work of ministry and mission that God has called us to do in this place. Contact the church office for more information.

### Women's Martha Circle

The Martha Circle meets Monday, February 10, at 9:30 a.m. at the church.

### Men's Bible Study Breakfast

All men of the congregation and friends are invited to a Men's Bible Breakfast study. The study meets Wednesdays, February 5 and 19—at 7:00 a.m. at the church for breakfast. You are welcome to attend – come when you are able, leave when you must. For more information, contact Bob Mueller, 320-630-0774.

### Afternoon Adult Bible Study Wednesdays, February 12 and 26 1:00 p.m.

All are welcome to this study led by Pastor Hank French. The study focuses on various topics, currently we are studying and comparing the beliefs of the major world religions with Christian beliefs. Come for study and discussion.

### Book Club

The February selection is The Space Between by Dete Meserve. The group meets Tuesday, February 25 at 7:00 p.m. in the church library. For more information, call Tifanii Dahl, 632-8207.

### Men in Mission Retreat Faith Formation in a Secular Age Friday evening-Saturday, February 21-22 Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Brainerd

Mark your calendars for this men's retreat in Brainerd. Keynote speaker on Saturday is Rev. Dr. Andy Root, Professor at Luther Seminary. Rev. Root is a leading scholar in youth ministry and practical theology. Breakout sessions will include topics such as, Whitecap custom rods, woodworking, home brewing, genealogy 101, and Wild and Free Wildlife. Registration options vary from \$20 for Saturday afternoon only (no meals) to \$40 for both Friday evening and Saturday (includes meals). For more information or to register, contact the church office.

### Now the Green Blade Rises

### 2020 NE MN EcoFaith Summit Saturday, March 28, 9:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Brainerd

The NE MN Synod EcoFaith Network leadership team presents this workshop to assist congregations with integrating care of creation throughout all of the congregation's activities. First Lutheran would like to send a team to this event, if you have a passion for creation care and would like to attend please contact the church office. Thank you!

## Mini Annual Report First Lutheran Church

The Annual Meeting of First Lutheran Church was held on Sunday, January 26, 2020. Thanks to all who made this meeting a priority! This “mini-report” is provided to help inform you of the important decisions made at this year’s Annual Meeting and to give highlights from the Annual Report. The complete Annual Report is available in the church gathering space.

### A few of the many ways that First Lutheran’s commissions and you were servants during the past year:

#### *Serving together in mission:*

- ✠ Provided in-kind giving through personal care kits, school backpacks, and Christmas gifts
- ✠ Support of local agencies: Morrison County Food Shelf, Habitat for Humanity, Oasis Central Minnesota
- ✠ Increased financial support to the wider church through the ELCA

#### *Serving together in worship and praise:*

- ✠ Vibrant worship using a variety of services and weekly holy communion
- ✠ Midweek worship during Lent and Advent

#### *Serving together in faith formation:*

- ✠ Supported “Children First” Christian Preschool in their 19<sup>th</sup> year of operation
- ✠ Held Vacation Bible School cooperatively with local congregations
- ✠ Coordinated a daily devotional written by members of the congregation during Advent
- ✠ 12 Students affirmed their faith on Reformation Sunday

#### *Serving together thru our building and grounds:*

- ✠ Provided meeting space to over 20 non-profit community organizations
- ✠ Maintaining the building and grounds with needed replacements/upgrades

### Statistical Reports

Baptized Membership (January 1, 2020)	1,113	Baptisms	18
Confirmed Membership (January 1, 2020)	810	Affirmation of Baptism/Confirmation	12
New Members Received	26	Marriages	2
Transferred Out	20	Funerals	7
Average Worship Attendance	2019 – 183		

### Summary Notes from Congregational Annual Meeting

#### *Not Official Minutes*

President Barb Stumpf declared a Quorum and called the meeting to order.

Elected to the Church Council were: Craig Ahlin, Doug Anderson, Lola Faufau, Les Hittesdorf, and Linda Mueller each to a 3-year term.

Jane Knott, Doug Luepke, and Ted Pfohl were elected as the congregational representatives for the Nominating Committee.

The Heartland Conference Gathering is Sunday, February 9 at First Lutheran Church, Aitkin; voting members are: Steve Jones, Kerry Olson and Mary Pfohl. The NE MN Synod Assembly is May 1-3, 2020 at Duluth. Voting members are: Steve Jones, Ted and Mary Pfohl.

The Luther Crest Bible Camp annual meeting is October 3, 2020. Voting members are Jeff Bigalke, Les Hittesdorf and Carl Rydeen.

Debra Yliniemi-Ahlin was elected as First Lutheran’s representative for the “His Hands and Feet” Stumpf Memorial Scholarship Committee.

The 2020 Mission Plan was approved as presented.

The new Council met briefly, officers were elected, they are: President, Barb Stumpf, Vice-President, Carl Rydeen, Secretary, Tifanii Dahl, Treasurer, Craig Ahlin.

## Excerpts from the Treasurer's Report

First Lutheran Church was blessed with generous donations in 2019. Thank you for your faithful support both in your commitment of time and financial support.

2019 Mission Plan – actual receipts toward operations were \$373,034. Thank you! Operating expenses were \$380,109, resulting in a deficit of \$7,075 for 2019. These amounts are exclusive of “Children First” Christian Preschool.

This will be our seventh year of our mortgage loan with ELCA Mission Investment Fund (MIF). Our original principal amount was \$569,303 with an interest rate of 3.875% adjusting after 5 years. The rate adjusted to 4.00% in 2018 and lowered our regular monthly payment to \$2,698.03; however we continued to make the higher payment as previously, resulting in additional principal payments of \$2,410.29. We received a gift of \$1,000 designated for mortgage principal reduction. As of December 31, 2019, the mortgage principal balance was \$415,975.

We received \$3,455 from a special offering on Pentecost Sunday which was designated for window replacement. Thank you!

Mission Plan 2020: The Mission Plan proposal for 2020 projects giving of \$380,000. The projected expenses are \$363,048. These amounts are exclusive of preschool.

Thank you for your many additional gifts, both in-kind for various ministries and projects around our church home.

You provided supplies for 100 personal care kits during Lent. Vacation Bible School children filled over 75 backpacks with school supplies for schools. You gave dollars and in-kind gifts to over 100 area families in need through the Angel Tree. Your continuous giving of time, talents, financial and unseen support for all those in need both in our local community and around the world is amazing.

It has been a great year at First Lutheran and I look forward to another great year in 2020.

God's blessings, Jennifer Schott, Treasurer

### 2019 Income and Expense Report and 2020 Proposed Mission Plan

	2019 Mission Plan	2019 Actual	Plan Variance	2020 Mission Plan
Total Giving	409,511	373,034	36,477	380,000
Preschool	17,210	16,686	524	31,290
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>426,721</b>	<b>389,720</b>	<b>37,001</b>	<b>411,290</b>
<b>Expenses</b>				
Pastoral Ministry	125,895	112,391	13,504	90,445
Lay Staff	158,693	144,486	14,207	145,782
Administrative Expense	22,201	22,576	(375)	23,021
Worship and Music	3,850	4,237	(387)	4,000
Congregational Life	4,470	3,193	1,277	4,470
Facilities and Property	32,150	36,320	(4,170)	33,400
Debt Service	35,590	35,590	-	35,590
Health	300	221	79	300
Education	3,700	2,250	1,450	3,500
Youth	4,010	941	3,069	3,510
Mission and Stewardship	18,830	17,904	926	19,030
<b>Total Expense before Preschool</b>	<b>409,689</b>	<b>380,109</b>	<b>29,580</b>	<b>363,048</b>
Preschool	17,210	23,094	(5,884)	30,584
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>426,899</b>	<b>403,203</b>	<b>23,696</b>	<b>393,632</b>
<b>Deficit/Surplus</b>	<b>(178)</b>	<b>(13,483)</b>	<b>13,305</b>	<b>17,658</b>

### Spiritual Reading

“This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words”

*1 Corinthians 2:13*

Spiritual reading is not only reading about spiritual people or spiritual things. It is also reading spiritually, that is, in a spiritual way! Reading in a spiritual way is reading with a desire to let God come closer to us.

The purpose of spiritual reading is not to master knowledge or information but to let God’s spirit master us. Strange as it may sound, spiritual reading means to let ourselves be read by God!

Spiritual reading is reading with an inner attentiveness to the movement of God’s Spirit in our outer and inner lives. With that attentiveness, we will allow God to read us and to explain to us what we are truly about.

*By Henri J. Nouwen*

### Caregiver Support Group

The Caregiver group will meet Thursday, February 6 from 10:00 a.m. to noon at Sprout in Little Falls. We will attend a class entitled “Soul Food-Cooking with Caregivers. The class is offered for anyone for \$5.00 per person and includes all ingredients and containers for a dinner for two. If you would like to attend, please contact Kelsey Benson at 320-468-2788 to rsvp.



### Youth News

#### Gospel Gang (Grades 3-5) and Family Three Bears Waterpark Trip Holiday Inn, Baxter Sunday, February 23 1:30-5:00 p.m.

Let’s have a great afternoon of waterpark fun! Meet at church at 1:30 p.m. we’ll travel to Baxter Holiday Inn for a fun time at Three Bears Waterpark. Your cost of \$10.00 includes admission, pizza and pop, First Lutheran will cover a portion of each ticket. Please sign up on the youth board. Parents/guardians, we will need your assistance with transportation. Please let us know how many youth you can transport in seat belts. If you prefer to meet at the waterpark, please let the church office know.

#### Youth Mission Trips Group Supper Meeting: Monday, February 24 6:00 p.m.



We are planning mission trips for both middle school (to Lake Traverse, South Dakota, June 21-26) and high school (to Denver, Colorado, July 5-10) youth. We partner with Youthworks to experience hands-on Christ-centered ministry with people in different life situations than youth might be familiar with. We will challenge ourselves to be the hands and feet of Christ as we seek to serve in mission in an active way.

We will have a pizza supper and discuss trip details and fundraising at the meeting on February 24. Youth and parent/s please attend. We have a few openings for each trip but will need to fill these soon. Your deposit of \$90.00 per person reserves your place on either trip. If you have questions, please contact Susan Gustner in the church office, 320-632-6667, or via email at [sgustner@fclittlefalls.org](mailto:sgustner@fclittlefalls.org).

## "Children First" Christian Preschool Update

We are one month into a new year with only four months left of Preschool. Wow, does time fly quickly! January classroom themes included: Snow and Polar Animals, A, B, C's/1,2,3's, and Dinosaurs. Please check out our artwork hanging in the education wing hallways. February fun is planned with Dental Health, Valentine's/Friends, and "I Love to Read" weeks. We are looking forward to the fun! Preschoolers have grown academically, socially, emotionally and in size! Please remember to update the sizes of extra clothing in their backpacks, thanks!

Thank you to everyone contributing to the 2019-20 Gifting Campaign. This campaign is our main source of fundraising for "Children First." Contributions support our outreach ministry partnership with Little Falls Health Services/Bridgeway Estates. We use the contributions to pay for bussing along with shared materials and art supplies. The residents look forward each month to our arrival. They enjoy the relationship-building and time they spend with the preschoolers. Thrivent Action Team® opportunities along with a small amount of online homework have also provided "Children First" with funds this past year. If you are a Thrivent member who would like to support "Children First" with an Action Team opportunity, please contact Gail. Thank you for the many donations of paper towels, napkins, markers, glue sticks and other classroom items, they are always needed and much appreciated!

"Children First" Christian Preschool continues to collect Coborn's/Cashwise points/dollars. These points are electronically collected if you are a "MORE Rewards" member at Coborn's/Cashwise. Points are gathered when you purchase Food Club brand or other Coborn's branded products and Coborn's then totals these points and distributes cash to support our Preschool. Sign up for "MORE Rewards" at any Coborn's or Cashwise store or <https://www.coborns.com/>. Once you signup or if you are already a member, login and choose

"Manage My Membership." Search "Children First" Christian Preschool, move the toggle switch to green and select "done."

Planning for the 2020-21 Preschool year is underway. This year we will be celebrating our 20<sup>th</sup> year as a Christian preschool! Current preschool families and First Lutheran Church members should watch for registration forms in February with Community Registration to begin in March. Visitors are always welcome. Please contact Gail or the church office if you are interested or would like more information.

Registration for the current 2019-20 Preschool year continues as well. Families interested in the "Children First" program may register and begin attending anytime throughout the preschool year as space is available. Registration forms are available on the counter in the First Lutheran Church gathering space or by calling the church office (320) 632-6667. Current families choosing to attend additional classes may contact staff and begin at anytime upon staff recommendation.

Each new day brings the gift of life and learning from God who created us. Each new day brings smiles and laughter from the some of the youngest in our midst. Thank you, Preschool families, for sharing your children with us. Our hope is that the gifts we share with them will be a lifetime of learning and God's love. Blessings!

Yours in Christ's Service,

Gail Hittesdorf, Director

*"Teach a child how he should live, and he will remember it all his life" Proverbs 22:6*



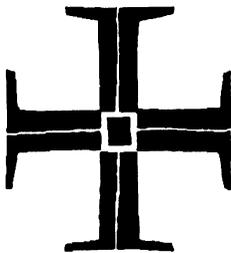


**When to Contact the Church Office:  
320-632-6667**

**email: [firstserv@fclittlefalls.org](mailto:firstserv@fclittlefalls.org)**

-  When you or a family member is hospitalized or will be hospitalized.
-  When there is a birth or death in the family.
-  When there is a crisis.
-  When you change your address or telephone number.
-  When new neighbors move in near you and they are looking for a church home.
-  When you have good news to share.
-  When you have a suggestion to make or a concern to share, you can contact a council member or a member of the Pastor Parish Relations Team.

Pastor and lay visitors are available to call on you and walk with you in sadness and joy.



**Worship Schedule**

- 8:30 a.m. Traditional Worship using a variety of liturgical settings.
- 9:35 a.m. Sunday School
- 10:30 a.m. Contemporary Worship led by a Praise Band
- Holy Communion at all Sunday services.

Items for the **March NEWSLETTER** are due on **February 20, 2020!**