

THE VISITOR



Volume 67, No. 2

February 2017

**“Blessed to serve God
and share our faith with
all!”**

Join us for Church on Sunday:

Choir Practice	9:04 a.m.
Sunday School for all ages	9:15 a.m.
Sunday Worship	10:30 a.m.
Fellowship	11:30 a.m.

CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION

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Bethel Home Page - <http://bethellutheranomaaha.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/BethelLutheranChurchOmaha>

~ Pastors Rich & Rebecca Sheridan ~

~ Pastor Rich Cell: 402-680-3901 ~

~Pastor Rebecca Cell: 402-658-7792 ~

~ Pastor Rebecca: pastor.rsheridan@gmail.com ~

~ Pastor Rich: rich@nebraskasynod.org ~

Church Council Executive Committee:

Jan Kammerer, Pres. (402-210-9870)

LeAnn Ryan, Vice Pres (402-639-7190)

Tom Haskell, Treas. (402-391-7966)

Erica Heiden, Secretary (308-991-7285)

Administrative Assistant: Laura Davis

Choir Director: Stephen Lawrence

Organist: Teri Davis

Custodian: Corey McDaniel

PASTOR’S MESSAGE

“Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit... So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” ~Acts 2:38, 41-42

A few weeks ago, we celebrated the liturgical festival day commemorating the “Baptism of Our Lord.” That same day, we baptized Todd and Evelyn Davis. In an article of *Living Lutheran* last month, baptism is also mentioned: Retired pastor Frank Honeycutt writes, “Baptism shapes our Christian identity. For a Christian, life begins and is viewed through this watery lens. You were ordained for ministry in baptism, a sacrament that exceeds (in biblical importance) any ordination.” And baptism served as a major topic of our January gathering of “Theology on Tap.”

I think it’s fair to say, though, that we Lutherans haven’t always been the best at keeping baptism front and center in our Christian walk. What I mean by this is not that we’ve necessarily been unfaithful, but that we weren’t always *intentional* about remembering our baptism. I know in the church I grew up, the font was usually covered and only opened when there *was* a baptism. At Bethel our font has wheels on the bottom—convenient, sure! But all too easy to push aside when it “gets in our way.”

But baptism is *supposed* to get in our way – it’s supposed to be central to our Christian journey, primary to who we are in Jesus Christ! And why wouldn’t we want it to be? When writing about the benefits of baptism, Martin Luther suggested that baptism “brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the words and promise of God declare.” As Lutherans, baptism is one of our two sacraments (along with holy communion). It is such an immense gift of God’s mercy! All too often, though we know it happened, we don’t do much reflecting on it.

So at our most recent “Theology on Tap,” we also discussed ways we might bring baptism to mind! Now just coming to worship will get you much of the way there, because both “confession and forgiveness” (which harkens back to baptism) and “thanksgiving for baptism” are common elements of our Sunday service. Even on days you’re only half awake, you might even be rudely awakened (but hopefully pleasantly reminded) of that baptism and its significance when sprinkled with living water from the font! Even outside worship, there are all kinds of ways to remember your baptism, too!

Making the sign of the cross on your forehead or across your whole body can help us remember it. Displaying some kind of wall hanging at home – a cross or scripture verse – can help us remember as we enter and exit our homes. Remembering our “baptismal birthday” by lighting our baptismal (or any) candle or saying a special prayer can mark the occasion and help us give thanks for this extraordinary gift. Even just pondering our baptism when we stand in the shower or take a bath can cause us to recall and reflect on who, and whose, we are.

This month, consider taking time out to remember your baptism. As you do, may you encounter, again and again, God’s presence, grace, forgiveness, and love.

Pastor Rich

Pastors’ Out of the Office

Pastor Rebecca and Pastor Rich will be out of the office February 16-18. If you have any pastoral care emergency during that time, please call Pastor Linda Walz at 1-402-806-0757 (cell).

Vitality Quick Check:

As part of our work with the Nebraska Synod, Pastor Rebecca in collaboration with the ELCA’s Research and Evaluation office developed a congregational “quick check” to assess congregational vitality and sustainability as a tool for all 250 congregations in the Nebraska Synod.

One way to measure growth and vitality of a congregation is by quantitative measures (growing numbers in worship, more active members participating in activities beyond worship, etc.). Another important measure of a congregation’s vitality, however, is qualitative (how well areas of ministry are being carried out

by the congregation). ELCA Research and Evaluation has identified 15 qualities that healthy congregations do well. In December of 2015, the Bethel Council took the Quick Check to assess Bethel’s health based on those 15 qualities below. On January 15 (the day of our annual meeting), 38 Bethel participants took the Quick Check again to see where we are a year later. Below are the averaged results.

Worship Nurtures People's faith

Deepens people's relationship with God

A clear sense of mission

Excitement about the congregation's future

Always ready to try something new

A positive force in the community

Works for social justice/advocacy

Incorporates new members into congregational life

Seeks out and uses the gifts of all members

Builds strong, healthy relationships among members

Manages disagreements in a healthy, respectful manner

Address social concerns (helping those in need)

Equip members to share their faith with others

Interact with the local community

Help members live out their faith in their daily lives

Total vitality score: 3.72

When the council took the Quick Check a year ago, the total average vitality score was 3.33. This is on a 5-point scale, 5 being very good health.

Obviously this is not an apples-to-apples comparison as more people took the Quick Check this year, but we can hope that in one year, our congregational health has improved. Worship nurturing people’s faith remained the highest score both years. Last year, the lowest score was “always ready to try something new.” This year, it was “works for social justice and advocacy.” Thank you to all who contributed to the Quick Check as it can help our council discern plans for our future!

BETHEL NEWS:

Council Retreat 2017:

The Bethel Lutheran council met for an all-day retreat on Saturday, January 21, 2017. The retreat started with discussion and reflection on an article authored by Pastor Dave Daubert titled *Luther’s Priesthood of Believers: A Simple Model*

for 21st Century Disciples. In his article, Daubert reminds Lutherans that all Christians, not just ordained priests, are transformed by the power of Jesus Christ, and the functions of all believers are to sacrifice, pray, and to proclaim the gospel.

Following this discussion we turned our attention to Bethel by reviewing our 2016 goals and listing all ministries and church activities that occur at Bethel throughout the year. This list was made with our four committees in mind: Stewardship & Service, Worship & Education, Evangelism & Public Relations, and Property & Finance. It is a vibrant and lengthy list, and going forward the council will be looking to focus the ministries and activities that occur at Bethel, guiding each committee in helping us achieve our mission: Blessed to Serve God and Share Our Faith with All.

Council officers were also elected at the retreat as follows:

President – Jan Kammerer
Vice President – LeAnn Ryan
Treasurer – Tom Haskell
Secretary – Erica Heiden

An all-committee meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 6 at 6:30pm, and the next council meeting will be held on Monday, February 13, at 6:00pm.

Worship and Education: Lutheranism 102

Last summer, Bethel's adult learners walked through the "Lutheran Handbook." In January, we started studying the "Lutheran Handbook 2!" Whether you're a lifelong Lutheran, joined us later in life, or just want to learn more, there's something for everyone in this study! And even if you didn't make Part 1, come join us to dig into our tradition—what makes it unique, and what it means for our lives today! This 8-week Study will run at 9am on Sundays through February 26th. Talk to Pr. Rich if you'd like to participate!

Ash Wednesday is March 1

You are invited to join us for worship with communion and imposition of ashes at 7pm at Bethel. Pastor Rebecca will also be leading and preaching at Immanuel Courtyard's Ash

Wednesday service at 2pm that day at 6759 Newport Ave. in the chapel – all are welcome!

Midweek Lenten Worship Opportunities

We will gather for fellowship with a potluck meal at 6:30pm followed by an informal worship service at 7pm in Pilgrim Hall on Wednesdays during Lent. This year, we are focusing on what it means to be the church using an interactive and intergenerational worship service designed by Nebraska Synod volunteers serving in congregations across the state.

March 8: We Are Church

March 15: We Are One

March 22: We Are Holy

March 29: We Are Catholic (it doesn't necessarily mean what you think!)

April 5: We Are Apostolic

Stewardship/Service:

Crossroads Prison Ministry

On February 26th, Bethel will host Crossroads Prison Ministry. Bethel will provide the service and meal, and Westminster Presbyterian will provide desserts and drinks. The service starts at 6:00 p.m., and a fellowship meal will follow. Everyone is invited to attend the service & dinner. Please come and see one of our ministries at work. There are lots of opportunities to help with this event. If you can help, please let Laura Davis or Pat Beatty know.

Thank yous:

Thank you to everyone for your generous donations to the mitten tree. Over 100 items were delivered to the Siena Francis House.

Bethel Women of the ELCA

Dear Pastor Rich, Pastor Rebecca, and the Bethel Family,

We are so grateful to be members of the Bethel Lutheran Church family. Since our first visit to Bethel, we have been continually touched by kind words and gestures, a sense of inclusion, teaching and guidance. The past year has been one of many blessings for us: from Evelyn's birth and baptism to discovering and renewing our own faith. We are blessed to be a part of this congregation, and we look forward to developing our faith and

spirituality as individuals and as a family. Thank you for the everlasting warmth and generosity you have shown our family. In gratitude,

Todd, Lisa, and Evelyn Davis

Dear Pastors,

Thank you for opening up your doors to us and allowing us a place to stay as we served in your community this week. Everyone we met this week was so welcoming, and we love that we got to see firsthand the amazing community of Omaha.

We love you.

CMU Alternative Winter Break '16

Dear Bethel Lutheran Church,

Thank you for your recent gift of \$2500.00 to support the mission and ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) through ELCA Good Gifts.

Because of donors like you, these good gifts and the good news of Jesus Christ will touch the lives of many. Your gift helps us care for our neighbors here at home and around the world by providing basic necessity items, tools for education, skills and instruments for meal preparation and self-care, resources for new congregations and their leaders. Thank you for responding to God's call to walk with our brothers and sisters in Christ's name.

God's grace,

Christina Jackson-Skelton

*Executive Director, Mission Advancement
ELCA*

Thank you for this gift, Bethel! Your generosity is a beautiful response to God's call to love our neighbors.

Robin Brown

Congregation Support

ELCA World Hunger

Dear Pastor Richard & Rebecca,

On behalf of the CASA for Douglas County Program, we thank you for your generous donation in support of our Holiday Appeal! We have the pleasure of working with some of the most remarkable children and families in our foster care and juvenile court system and would not be able to do so without you.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Thomas, Executive Director

Thank you so much for all you have done for CASA this year. Your generosity is amazing. We are so grateful.

Kim

Dear Friends of Crossroads,

Thank you for your recent contribution to Crossroads Connection Ministries of a large quantity of paper plates and other paper goods. Your generosity significantly supports our weekly fellowship meal following worship.

Upon release from incarceration, men in the Project LIFE program are provided with safe housing, assistance with employment, support for obtaining community services, and encouragement and mentoring as they transition back into community life.

Know that your recent and ongoing gifts are being put to productive use in our ministry for the Glory of God. Thank you!

Guy Shelton, Secretary

Crossroads Connection Ministries

Dear Bethel Church Members,

On behalf of Douglas County Health Center, I would like to convey our appreciation for your donation of Christmas gifts to our long-term care residents. They truly enjoyed opening the wonderful items that you chose for them and your gifts helped them feel remembered and loved during this holiday season.

Sincerely yours,

Amy Chittenden, President

Thanks to everyone who supported our Christmas Craft Sale. Thanks to you, we raised \$296.75 for the church!

Pat Ranney

Lutheran Women of Omaha

Lutheran Women will meet at Kountze Memorial Lutheran Church, 2650 Farnam St., February 14, 2017 at 12:00 p.m. The program will be the Bryant Fisher family history. The Free Will offering will be the ELCA Disaster Relief Fund. Send your reservations to Mardelle Gocek at (402) 292-1328 by February 12.

SERVING IN WORSHIP

SERVING AFTER CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

****Please sign up to host after-church fellowship. The calendar is in the kitchen. Thank you****

ALTAR FLOWER DONATIONS:

02/05 Bob & Patty Shalberg
02/12 Dan & Kathy Vacek
02/19 Laura Davis
02/26 Robert & Pat Ranney

READERS/COMMUNION ASSISTANTS

02/05 Ellen & Sam Schroeder
02/12 Lori Rogers
02/19 Jan Kammerer/JoAnn MacCallum
02/26 Dan MacCallum/Steve Kraft (10:30 am)

BIRTHDAYS

02/02 Ruth Rehwinkle
02/05 Rosemary Huetter
02/09 Kathy Vacek
02/11 Gloria McDaniel
02/12 Sarah Kiihne
02/12 Liliana Ross
02/15 Jan Kammerer
02/19 Mary Spielmann
02/21 Matt Harald
02/25 Cade Williams
02/28 Betty Myers
02/28 Timothy Williams



Transfiguration of Our Lord



You may contribute to the ministry that happens here at Bethel via credit or debit card. Use your smartphone to scan this QR code, which will take you directly to our homepage and click “donate here”

SCAN THIS QR CODE TO GIVE