



**FROM THE
PASTOR'S DESK**

*"For everything there is a season,
and a time for every purpose under
heaven . . . a time to build."*

Ecclesiastes 3:1-3

It has now been nearly a year since you called me to serve as your Pastor at Holy Cross, and our family moved to Dakota Dunes. One of the things that surprised me when we moved here was how construction never seems to stop, no matter what the season or weather. When I was growing up, construction was a very seasonal trade. But, it seems it is always "a time to build" in Dakota Dunes!

Beginning last January, we watched out our living room window as the house next door was built from the ground up. (Digging their basement rattled our house and the earth-movers seemed to get a bit close sometimes!) Much of the work was done in very unfavorable conditions, cold, rain, sleet and snow. But, even under those conditions, the workers carried on non-stop and built up a lovely new home in just a few months.

Like those unfavorable conditions for building a house, I shared with the congregation a few months ago some statistics which seem to show that conditions may be unfavorable at this time for building up a Lutheran church in the

Siouxland area. Statistics which are available on the Internet, for both our own Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, show that over the past decade almost all of the Lutheran congregations in Siouxland have experienced declines in membership and attendance, generally from 25%-33%. The data further shows that the congregations which have remained stable have garnered most of their new members by transfer from other congregations. For example, one congregation of several thousand members received *no* adult converts last year, either by Affirmation of Faith or Baptism, but *all* their new adult members came by transfer from other churches.



A year-end review of our congregation's statistics shows that in 2002 the average weekly attendance was 19, but in 2003 it jumped to 41, a one-year increase of 115%! This jump in attendance reflects both an increasing number of visitors and an exciting increase in membership, culminating with the reception of these 23 new members on November 23.

In the midst of this apparent downward trend among Lutheran churches in our area, at Holy Cross we are "swimming against the stream" and striving to build up a new congregation, largely on the basis of reaching out to those without a church home. But, if a Lutheran church in our area with several thousand members received not one adult convert in an entire year, it may make us wonder: how can we expect to have success in our efforts?

The good news is, like the continual construction in Dakota Dunes no matter what the weather, despite the apparent unfavorable conditions 2003 was nevertheless "a time to build" for Holy Cross! The key indicator of a congregation's growth is average worship attendance, and we praise God that during 2003 our average worship attendance *more than doubled!*

According to guidelines established by the LCMS, average worship attendance is calculated by totaling the attendance at all Sunday and other scheduled services, such as Advent, Lent, Christmas Eve, etc., and then dividing the total by 52 weeks to determine the average weekly attendance. A year-end review of our congregation's statistics shows that in 2002 the average weekly attendance was 19, but in 2003 it jumped to 41, a one-year increase of 115%!

That also represents the highest average weekly attendance in our congregation's history. Though the figures may be relatively small compared to established congregations, the percentage of increase shows a very healthy trend indeed.

An example is the First Sunday after Christmas, which is usually a bit "slow" for most congregations. In 2002 there were five in attendance at Holy Cross on this Sunday, but in 2003 that jumped to 30. The highest single attendance was over 150 at the Children's Christmas Service. Our two services on Christmas Eve totaled 115, the majority of whom were first-time visitors. The highest

attendance for a Sunday morning service was 112 on October 12. Attendance was also very strong at Advent and Lent services.

St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow." So, we give all praise and thanks to God alone for our welcome increase in attendance during 2003. This increase in attendance reflects both an increasing number of visitors and an exciting increase in membership, culminating with the reception of 23 new members on November 23.

As we move into 2004, we pray that God will continue to bless our efforts, and that He will once again make this new year "a time to build" for Holy Cross!

Pastor Kevin Vogts

Pastor Vogts to Lead District Evangelism Sessions

The South Dakota District is holding District workshops in January, at Aberdeen and Sioux Falls on January 17 and 18 and Chamberlain and Rapid City on January 24 and 25. Pastor Vogts has been asked by District President Vernon Schindler to lead sessions for these workshops on "Evangelism in Small Towns."

Crossnotes

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Because the session in Rapid City on January 25 begins at 4:30pm, Pastor Vogts will need to leave immediately after the service. For Adult Bible Class that morning we will have a fascinating video, from the History Channel, about Biblical Archaeology in the Holy Land.



Fourteen LCMS Chaplains Serving in Iraq

There are currently 14 Chaplains from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod serving with the United States Military forces in Iraq. Please pray for their safety, the success of their ministry, and their loved ones "back home."

Here are comments from some of the LCMS Chaplains about serving in this unique setting:

Chaplain (Major) Jon Mau — "We have more than half the battalion's personnel spread out over 10 work sites located in north-central Iraq. I do the

"I've never been as excited or convinced that I'm doing the Lord's work as here!"

best I can, visiting the soldiers. I feel like a circuit rider, spending 4-5 days a week on the road, putting about 600 miles a week on my vehicle. There are moments when I feel a little 'anxious' about the trips. Most of the hostile activity lately has been directed against convoys. We had a convoy attacked near the Iranian

border... that resulted in one soldier dying, another losing a leg, and several others with shrapnel injuries. A week later, the very same platoon was hit again with a soldier getting shot by a sniper. I was on the road when the first incident occurred and was able to be present with the soldiers within an hour. The moment I arrived, several soldiers approached me and said, 'Chaplain, we need to pray!' In minutes, the entire group had gathered and petitions were being offered to God on behalf of the lost soldier's family and those who were receiving medical attention. Since those events, the members of that platoon have been particularly eager and receptive to my ministry efforts. I feel a close bond to them and look forward to occasions when we find comfort and courage in God's Word together... Pray for us and our families."

Chaplain (Captain) Mark Moss —

"The atmosphere here can be both exhilarating and dreadful at the same time...

We survived [explosive device] attacks on our convoy up here with only two wounded... However, we lost our first soldier last week... Last night, we took incoming mortars



on our position; one landed 10 feet from a fueler which was about 80 yards from my sleeping quarters... I've started a Lutheran service here... Pray for the safety of our soldiers. Pray also that we can reach the soldiers here with the Gospel. I've never been as excited or convinced that I'm doing the Lord's work as here. I also see a hunger here for the Gospel that is not always present in garrison ministry... Those who man the outposts, do patrols and escort duty, who put their lives at risk every day, are especially open to hearing the Church's message."

Chaplain (Captain) George Shaffer — "Hello from Babylon! Yes, that's right, we are at the ancient city of

Babylon where the ruins of the tower are... the rebuilt castle of Nebuchedezzar, the gate of Isis, and the temples of the various gods of the Babylonian empire still exist... I'm doing well and ministry is very demanding... Our battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Kim Orlando, and three other soldiers were killed in a confrontation on October 16... We continue to get sniped at, hand grenades turned into us by civilians who were paid to use them... [I've been able] to share with the local people who are very interested in my position as a chaplain. All in all, the Lord's work prevails in an area once dominated by an evil and sinister regime—both recently and almost 2500 years ago."

LCMS Chaplains in Iraq

Chaplain (Colonel)

Arthur Bacon, USAR

From Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
Serving at Camp Anaconda, Balad

Chaplain (Major)

Robert Burmeister, USAR

From Spring Valley, Minnesota

Chaplain (Major)

Thomas Elbert

From Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas

Chaplain (Lieutenant)

Gale Everson, ARNG

From East Helena, Montana

Chaplain (Major)

Richard Graves

From Wiesbaden, Germany

Chaplain (Major)

John Herrmann, USAR

From Fair Oaks, California
Serving Near Baghdad

Chaplain (Captain)

David Jacob

From Vilseck, Germany
Serving at Kirkuk Air Base

Chaplain (Captain)

Daniel Jones, ARNG

From Bethlehem, Georgia

Chaplain (1st Lieutenant)

Greg Lucido

From Ft. Carson, Colorado

Chaplain (Major)

Jon Mau, USAR

From Canon City, Colorado
Serving at an Airfield near Tikrit



The Morning and Afternoon Monday-Wednesday-Friday Preschool classes enjoyed dressing up for their Halloween party.

Chaplain (Captain)

Mark Moss

From Ft. Riley, Kansas
Serving "Junction City" at Ar Ramadi

Chaplain (Captain)

George Shaffer

From Ft. Campbell, Kentucky
Serving Camp Babylon, Hillah, and at Najaf, al Kut, Karbala and Diwaniyah

Chaplain (Major)

Paul Sherouse

From Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama
Serving Camp Sather at Baghdad International Airport

Chaplain (Captain)

Scott Simpson

From Ft. Hood, Texas
Serving at Tikrit

January 11
Morgan Kaardahl

January 18
Casey Johnson

January 25
Austin Munns



Emma Marie Bargstadt

Born October 26, 2003

Caitlyn Elizabeth Bargstadt

Born January 30, 2001

Daughters of
Mike and Daniell Bargstadt
Baptized December 21, 2003

"These little ones who believe in Me."
Matthew 18:6



January 4
Sarah Vogts



Missionaries of the Month

Each month we remember in prayer in our worship specific missionaries sponsored around the world by our congregation, through our Synod and related organizations. You are encouraged to remember them also in your personal and family prayers.

January 4
Megan Collins
Thailand

Megan is joining the Concordia Gospel Ministry team in Bangkok to teach English as a Second Language classes. Pray that the relationships she develops will give her opportunities to share Christ.

January 11
Dr. Stephen and Julia Lutz
Papua New Guinea

The Lutzes serve as medical missionaries in Papua New Guinea, where the medical needs are severe due to disease and injuries from tribal warfare. Pray for their safety in this dangerous situation as they seek to comfort the sick and injured in the name of Christ.

January 18
Rev. David and Joyce Erber
Nigeria

Rev. Erber teaches at the Jonathan Ekong Memorial Lutheran Seminary in Obot Idim, preparing Pastors for the Lutheran Church of Nigeria and other African nations. Give thanks for the success and growth of the Lutheran Church in Nigeria, a largely Muslim nation, and pray that the native Pastors Rev. Erber is training may be successful in reaching out to their own people with the Good News of salvation.



Poinsettia Donations



Thank you to all who donated poinsettias to beautify our church this Christmas, and to all who helped decorate. The church was especially beautiful for our Christmas celebrations!

Given By

Mike & Daniell Bargstadt (2)
Doug & Sue Jansen
Paul & Diana Kaardal
Doug & Janet Martin (2)
Mabel Schibonski
Rev. Kevin & Terese Vogts
Rev. Kevin & Terese Vogts

In Memory or Honor Of

George Bargstadt (Father)
Paul Jansen
Grandma Bay
Elmer Schibonski (Husband)
Leroy Vogts (Father)
Grandparents

January 25
Charles Burnett
Taiwan

Charles teaches English and the Bible at the Concordia Middle School in Chia-Yi, where he has served for over six years. Pray that the Lord will open the door to for him share Christ with students and their families.

tained anywhere and you may provide your own vase or use one of the assortment in the church kitchen.

Thank you for these flower donations to beautify our worship during November and December. A separate list of poinsettia donations is above.

November 2
Rev. Kevin & Terese Vogts
In Memory of Leroy Vogts
and Grandparents

November 9
Doug & Sue Jansen
Honoring All Veterans

November 16
Mabel Schibonski
95th Birthday

November 23
Paul & Diana Kaardahl
10th Wedding Anniversary

Joey & Marcy Shcroeder
New Member Sunday

December 7
Jim & Rose Rosenbaum
In Memory of Father

December 21
Mike & Daniell Bargstadt
Girl's Baptism & Ben's Birthday



Sign Up for Flowers in 2004

A new sign-up sheet to provide flowers for worship in 2004 is on the bulletin board. These will be listed in the bulletin and newsletter.

Occasions to remember include anniversaries, birthdays, in memory of loved ones, etc. Flowers may be ob-



Thank you to the entire congregation for the generous Christmas gift certificate, and to the many individual members who gave cards and gifts.

Rev. Kevin and Terese Vogts



Lutheran Congregations Dedicate Buildings, Celebrate Growth in Siberia

One of the fastest-growing mission fields for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is in Russia and other portions of the former Soviet Union. There was a significant Lutheran presence in these countries before the Communist purges, and now the revived Lutheran Church is once again flourishing.

A festival service was held at the Lutheran Church of the Transfiguration of Our Lord in the Russian city of Touim, Siberia on August 19, 2003 celebrating the fifth anniversary of the consecration of the church building. The celebration began with a procession, in which the parishioners walked from the parsonage through the town's main streets all the way to the church.

Members of the Lutheran church in Touim, Siberia process through the town to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the consecration of their church building.



Pastor Pavel Zayakin and the congregation of St. Luke Lutheran Church in Abakan, Siberia pose in their newly rented church building.

Christmas Eve is celebrated by members of the "mother church" at Novosibirsk.



Everyone followed the crucifix and an icon of the Transfiguration of Christ, while singing the Te Deum. On the church steps Rev. Pavel Zayakin, Pastor of St. Luke Lutheran Church in Abakan, gave a congratulatory speech.

Guests from Novosibirsk and Abakan came for the celebration. "Your congregation was the first daughter parish of our church," said Daria Lytkin, one of the guests from Novosibirsk. "We look at you and are proud, because, despite all difficulties and temptations, you have remained faithful to the church. We congratulate our dear brothers and sisters on this fifth anniversary"

After the divine service—at which there weren't enough seats for everyone!—there was tea, conversation, and a bonfire.

On October 18, a rented building was consecrated for the congregation of St. Luke Lutheran Church in Abakan. "Our congregation does not have its own building. We just dream and pray about having it," says Pastor Zayakin.

"Now we are renting a place for the church. Earlier we rented another building which was bigger than this one. But prices are going up fast, and that building became too expensive for us, and so we had to move. Our new building is not very big, but it is not very far from the city center, and it is convenient for the parishioners to get there. And also of importance is that the local technical university is close by, and we have already started missionary work among the students."

Please pray for our growing Lutheran congregations in Siberia and their missionary work.

Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church

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