



### PASTOR'S LETTER

Greetings Sisters, Brothers, Siblings in Christ,

I give thanks for you always. When we are in agreement, there is joy. When we disagree with each other, we turn to God in prayer and (in time) there is joy.

I think we like our little church because we have been welcomed and our mission to welcome everyone to the love of God fits well with our sense of what it means to be a follower of Christ. Our little church brings us joy, but not always, not in every moment.

Because we are a diverse group, our sense of acceptable behavior during worship varies widely. Because our definitions of acceptable behavior vary, our ideas and practices of welcoming everyone also vary widely.

Faced with the ever-changing landscape of society around us, how do we decide when to update our practices and what about our practices should remain? The Apostle Paul tells us "For us all things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial." (NRSV, 1 Cor 6:12a)

My own standard of acceptable behavior during worship tends to favor the first part of Paul's statement. I'd like to remove any and all barriers to people's experience of God. It sounds like I set a low bar, but in many ways this standard is too high to actually achieve.

Worded differently, I'd say I try not to sacrifice the needs of others in service of my needs and ideals about right relationship with God. It's too high because it's not possible to live without feeding body, mind and spirit. Even if it were possible, I can't imagine it would please God to starve oneself in service to others. At best, we discover the boundaries between meeting our own needs and allowing others to meet their own needs without either of us devouring the other.

Finding these boundaries is the work of a lifetime and few of us get there. In the meantime, we tend to build barriers to block the holes in our boundaries. The barriers are like signs that say "I don't care what you think you need, you can't have this." Our barriers are sometimes obvious, even to others. Sometimes they are invisible, even to ourselves.

Invariably, our barriers make right relationship impossible. As your pastor, even after three years, I

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bump into barriers sometimes. You thought they were obvious, I was oblivious.

For instance, over the past year or so, many people have expressed their delight when I occasionally invite children to the altar to witness, learn and participate in preparing communion. To others, it seems disrespectful and would rather I end the practice altogether. I had not understood how deeply this offend them when last we talked about this in the congregation.

At times like this, joy can drain away from our common experience and despair can fill the void. And yet, we know that all things are possible for God. God speaks possibility into reality. "In beginning, God said..." God shares stories. To Abraham, God said "your descendants will be too numerous to count." To Mary, God said, "You will bear a child..." Perhaps we can restore each other in a spirit of gentleness by sharing stories about where we have found joy in our lives of faith.

We have many opportunities to come together as a community, as a congregation this month. On Sunday, August 4th, we'll have our First Sunday Special fellowship between services. Stay after the 8:30a service, come early to the 10:30a service, see the people you've been missing. Saturday the 17th, we'll roll-up our sleeves in service to the community at the Cereal & Clothing Give-Away. On Thursday, the 22nd, Jan and I will host a BBQ at the parsonage. Then we'd like to encourage small group gatherings. Maybe we can call it "Journeys into Joy". We can host, you can host, or we could meet up at a café or restaurant. Stay tuned.

Peace,  
Pr Jean

P.S. About children at the altar: Let us compromise for the sake of communal harmony. The 10:30 am service will remain the more formal and traditional service (only the presider at the altar). Should teaching moments present themselves at the 8:30 am service, the presiding minister will be free to follow through, at their discretion.

## MINSITRIES

### EMERGENCY RESERVE FUND

The Bethlehem Council has approved the formation of an Emergency Reserve Fund, created to ease tension to the general fund. To be used for current expenses and not for capital improvements, funds are to be "borrowed" and repaid at the first opportunity. Congregation members are encouraged to donate to this fund above their regular giving – not in place of it. As always, thank you for your generous support of our Bethlehem community.

### BETWEEN SERVICES COFFEE

Please come join us for some fellowship time between services on August 4th at 9:30. Our goal for these first Sunday of the month coffees is two-fold: to get to know the members of our congregation that usually attend another service and to raise money for different congregational needs. At our first coffee in July \$169 was raised for our Youth Group and we all had yummy Blueberry Breakfast Casserole. Come enjoy this event!

### CEREAL & CLOTHING GIVE-AWAY AUG 17TH

We're collecting children's clothing and cereal for our annual (back-to-school) "Give-Away". Once again, Meadowgold Dairy has furnished coupons for milk.

Please donate cereal and new or clean, gently used, clothing.

We'll host the give-away on Saturday, August 17th from 8 a.m. until 2 p.m.

### WELCA SYNODICAL GATHERING, SEP 27TH-28TH

The theme this year is BAPTIZED AND SET FREE. It will be held at Bethel Lutheran Church in Great Falls. Friday is the Business meeting of our convention, where we will be voting for our 2019 – 2021 Board, Voting Members for the Triennial Convention in 2020, our Budget and any resolutions that are submitted. Saturday is our Gathering, in which we will be collecting our change for the Pool of Living Waters, meet with Lois Bylund, our Churchwide Representative,

hear our main speaker Rev. Julia Seymour, hear about Women's Health issues, do a book study and meet with other women from Montana and Northern Wyoming.

Barb Bohle will represent Bethlehem's WELCA group as a voting delegate.

GATHER BIBLE STUDY, CIRCLE AUG 8TH, 12:30P



We have our final session of the summer series "For just such a time as this" using the book of Esther. This session is called "Using our Voices".

Please note the Mary/Martha and Naomi Circles combined. We meet the second Thursday of each month at 12:30 p.m. and discuss the text study from Gather Magazine.

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AUGUST BIRTHDAYS

|                 |    |
|-----------------|----|
| Paul Ortega     | 1  |
| Dennis McCave   | 2  |
| Lacey Searles   | 8  |
| Nita Adams      | 13 |
| Constance Sider | 18 |
| Catherine Card  | 19 |
| Gabe Senn       | 24 |
| Johnna Voto     | 24 |

2019 CHURCH COUNCIL

- Pr. Jean Hay - 696-9586
- Margie Shea - Council President - 671-1514
- Casey Anguiano - Council V.P. - 534-2198
- Johnna Voto - Secretary - 670-1370
- Darlene Fernelius - Treasurer - 652-2356
- Jerry Bauck - Council Member - 248-7946
- Gayle Breeding - Council Member - 694-4242
- Dave Brockman - Council Member - 927-5729
- Dennis McCave - Council Member - 702-4983
- Jessie Hanna - Alternate - 598-7322

BETHLEHEM'S CORE IDENTITY

OUR MISSION

Welcome everyone to the love of God.

OUR VISION

- Recognize and embrace our strengths as a Christ-centered community while seeking to meet our financial obligations, understanding that we are in the world but not of it.
- Seek to maintain our positive culture while also growing in cultural diversity, and broadening our reach to members of all ages.
- Increase transparency regarding the business side of being a church, increase communication, community ties and benevolence within and outside the congregation.

ALL ARE WELCOME

Christ has welcomed us, whoever we are. Because of this, we at Bethlehem Lutheran Church are glad to welcome you. None of the distinctions that divide our world apply here!

- young, old or in between;
- white, black, native, Hispanic, whatever your ancestry;
- married, single, divorced, a single parent, whatever your family of choice;
- rich, poor, middle class, employed or unemployed;
- a lifelong Christian, just now seeking faith, or not really sure;
- straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, questioning, however you identify;
- healthy of mind and body, living with mental illness, disabled or sick;
- struggling with addiction, in recovery, or if you love those who are;
- liberal, conservative, or ambivalent;
- homeless, a former convict, or in any way longing for acceptance.

At Bethlehem, we offer safety, love and the ministry of Word and Sacrament to everyone who seeks it. Come and be part of this welcome, as equal, as free, as a beloved child of God! All ARE welcome!