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### DECEMBER 2022 NEWSLETTER



Church Council

**December Church Council Meeting Highlights:** Church Council met for its regular meeting on Monday, December 12th with all 11 members present. Financial Report as of November 30th: General Fund \$2,338; Building Fund \$6,238; Memorial Fund \$8,835. We have about a one month reserve in the Building Fund and less than a week of reserve in the General Fund. Christian Education Committee gave updates on the after-school program, next summer's mission trip, and an upcoming Bible journaling class. Property Committee gave updates on snow clearing, minor issues with our lighting and heating systems, and dead tree removal. Nominating Committee has begun its work for 2023 elections. Personnel Committee will convene to conduct an annual check-in with staff. Nominating Committee will encourage 3-5 people to join the Finance Committee. Pictorial directory update: the company will provide digital copies of the photos to include in our print own directory. A year-end letter will be sent to every member encouraging year-end contributions. Bus update: Craig Moulton and Dan Dahlberg are now the point people and are resuming every Sunday pick-ups. Backpack Food Program is now up and running; made a motion to direct \$805 from the Rush City Student Assistance Fund toward the program. Building Use Form was reviewed for final updates and clarifications. At the invitation of First Lutheran in Harris, approved a motion to have a conversation about possible shared ministry with them and other nearby congregations. Approved a motion for Christmas gifts (\$30 gift certificates to *Fiesta Cancun*) to be given to the 4 regular part-time staff. The next Council Meeting is Monday, January 9th at 7:00 PM. Full minutes of the meeting are available in the church office.

**Christmas Program Sunday, December 18th:** It was wonderful to have our children make the old story of Christmas new for us again. Special thanks to Jaime Holmstrom for directing, to Pastor Nathan on piano, to Annette Hanson-Sias, Val Larson, and Amanda Martin for helping the kids get ready, to Laura Nelson, Brenda Taylor and others who helped with the meal afterwards, and to Cory Sias for building the set (*including mounting a large, beautiful star!*). With the program integrated into worship our worship life, it was a valuable opportunity for families to worship together, hear God's word and gather at Lord's table for communion.



**Thank You:** Dear Bev and the Quilting Ladies of First Lutheran Church, Thank you so much for the generous (and beautiful) donation of fabric to the FACS department at Rush City High School! It is very much appreciated and will be used for our new Intro to Sewing class beginning in January. Sincerely, Bernadette

Thank You: Thank you for hosting our Christmas Concert! East Central Minnesota Chorale Board



Thank You: Thank you for the beautiful service for our sister Gwen. Special thanks to Pastor Nathan for all he did for the family. Bless you! Gwen Olson Family

Joy to the World: Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. The Vets Home has opened its doors to visitors. Randy & Kristie Ziesmer



**In the Family:** We're happy to share births, baptisms, marriages and deaths for members and others connected to our church family. Keep in touch and let us know who we may have missed.

Deaths: Glenn Otto Stream (June 12, 1938 - December 20, 2022)  
Dorothy Kurzhals (January 21, 1943 - December 24, 2022)

Compassionate God, give courage and faith to all who mourn, that they may have strength to meet the days ahead with steadfastness and patience; not as those who are without hope, but in thankful remembrance of your great goodness, and in the joyful expectation of eternal life in your presence, with those they love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

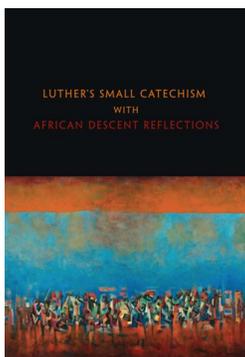
Baptism: Wyatt Daniel Lenss on Sunday, December 4th  
(parents: Christian and Desirae Lenss, grandparents: Dan and Deb Dahlberg, great-grandmother: Gloria Oscarson)

Gracious God, we thank you for the new life you give us through holy baptism. Continue to strengthen us with the Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence; through Jesus Christ our Lord.



### Small Catechism: African Descent Reflections by Pastor Nathan

Like last year, my newsletter article series for this year focuses on the Small Catechism, but from a different and relevant perspective. (For an introduction to this year's series and previous articles, see the Newsletter Archive on our website.) Although after nearly 500 years Luther's catechism contains timeless wisdom, it has long been a tradition for each generation of Lutherans to renew their reflections on these central teachings. For the first time, our church has asked several African descent pastors and teachers to answer Martin Luther's critical question: "What is this?" or "What does this mean?" This is the final article in the series.



I love teaching our children about our big, beautiful table in the sanctuary where we celebrate the Lord's Supper every week. Here, as Martin Luther says in the Small Catechism, we encounter "the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." Indeed, the body and blood of Jesus flows through all of us who gather around this large table. The table's prominent size, in fact, symbolizes that our sharing in the body of Christ is not an "I" experience but a "we" experience. As the African Descent Reflections teach us, "Without the community, there is no I. Without the body of Christ—that is, the community—eucharist (another word for communion that means "thanksgiving") doesn't happen."

Whenever we come to the Lord's table, we are joining all those whom Christ invites to his forgiveness, peace, and love. This includes all those who have died in the faith before us. And it includes those whom the world has otherwise (intentionally or not) cast aside or neglected.

Before we undertook this year-long study of Luther's Small Catechism with African Descent Reflections, I had no idea there were fourteen prominent leaders and teachers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America who are of African descent. Nor did I imagine all of them loving Luther's Small Catechism and being eager to share their reflections. What's more, they and others have opened my eyes to a new awareness of African descent people's presence and contributions to the whole Christian church.

Even after going to seminary, it's humbling for me to realize how little I know about the presence and contributions of African descent people in the church. I never knew, for instance, about Adrian of Canterbury, an indigenous African man who was a leader in developing the new church of England in the late 600's where he directed a school that trained other leaders. He was even offered twice to be the head leader of the church in England, but declined since he preferred to teach the Bible and direct the school.

Even in the Bible itself, in the book of Acts, although I knew the story of the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, I never realized its significance until recently (see Acts 8:26-40). In his book, Black Lives Matter to Jesus, Marcus Jerkins points out that this African man is the first non-Jewish person (that is, someone outside Jesus' inner circle) to be baptized: "Of all the various peoples... an Ethiopian, 'the blackest and remotest' of the people in the world, was chosen." This event held great significance in the early church, for it held that "God's desire to restore his children, to reclaim all of the children of Adam, rightly begins with those considered ugly ducklings among the nations of the world." This African man's baptism paves the way, a few chapters later, for Simeon the Black to be lifted up as a leader in the first church of Antioch (Acts 13:1).

Like I said, it has been humbling for me to slowly see and begin to respect the presence and contributions of those who don't look like me and whose culture and experience is foreign to me. The body of Christ is very rich and diverse—just as God chose it to be. The table is very large indeed.

Questions for reflection:

1. How do you experience the large table in our sanctuary?
2. Who is someone new to you and shares your faith in Jesus Christ? How has their faith enriched your own?
3. God intentionally makes the church diverse. How do you experience the richness of this diversity?