

St. Pauli News in Detail



Greeting and Ushering

April 6 Wade Benson
April 13 Corey Berg
April 20 Neil Bugge
April 27 Jim Strandlie

Altar Preparation:

April 20 Cindy Cedergren
April 27 Tammy Haugen

SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING HELD MARCH 30

These are not official minutes. It is just a recap of the special congregational meeting held on Sunday, March 30, following worship services.

The purpose for the meeting was to discuss the possible purchase of a generator, due to the increase of our insurance property loss deductible to \$10,000.

Jim Rondorf secured quotes from Clearbrook and Red Lake Electric. He and Kevin Reich compared quotes and explained the systems, warranties, etc. A motion and second was made and approved unanimously to purchase the system from Red Lake Electric and propane tank work from Red Lake County Cooperative.

WELCA meets on April 23rd 3:00 pm

To finish putting together the Lutheran World Relief kits and arrange them and the quilts around the altar for Blanket Sunday, we need to move our meeting date up one week.

Field Trip to Waukon Dairy

Monday, April 7

Bus leaves St. Pauli parking lot at 9:00 am

Tours of the Waukon Dairy Farm near Gary, MN have been arranged for Monday, April 7th. T.H.E. Bus will provide transportation and the cost for that will be \$10 per person. The Council voted to have the church pick up any balance due on the cost of the bus.

We will arrive at the dairy about 10:00 am and proceed as two groups for the guided tours, which will take about an hour. Lunch will be at Erickson's Smoke House in Fertile (at your own cost), followed by a stop at Opdahl's Donuts for an opportunity to purchase cookies, donuts or pies.

Please contact Faye Auchenpaugh to let her know whether or not you will be able to attend. We need to give Erickson's a count for lunch. auchenpaugh@gmail.com, 218-681-3410 or 218-689-7636 (text).

Friends from outside of the church are welcome.

April Milestones



Birthdays

None.

Anniversaries

No April anniversaries either.

Church council will not meet face-to-face in April because the regular meeting date is on Maundy Thursday. If issues arise, we will meet via email.



In Memorium

Larry Dennis Rude

May 15, 1944 – March 21, 2025

Larry grew up in the St. Pauli congregation alongside his siblings Betty, Carol, Harlan, Sharon, Charlene, Arlo, LaDawn, Charlotte, Candice, David and Tim.

One of the sweetest guys on the planet passed away on Friday, March 21, 2025, of a stroke.

Larry was born in Thief River Falls on May 15, 1944, to Herman and Beatrice Rude, the 5th child of a family of twelve. All twelve kids became smart, hard-working adults, and good looking.

Larry graduated from Lincoln High in 1962. He was a member of the school choir. He followed his father and became an electrician. He worked on many large construction projects, including coal-fired power plants, atomic power plants, taconite plants and other similar projects in various locations in the country.

Larry was a jack of all trades and a master of most. His favorite was working with stained glass and meeting all the fantastic people who were his students or customers. A big thank you to Bill Krall, his sidekick, who helped him with the big projects.

Larry was always good-natured, kind and fun. He and Cathy got married in 1991 and had a wonderful 34 years together. He so looked forward to being with his daughter, Shari (Jon), and grandchildren, Vincent and Siena, when they came up north to visit.

His son, Denny, and daughter, Terri, sadly have passed away.

He loved his stepson, Sean (Bobbi); and his granddaughter, Kristi (Jon) Addy; and his great granddaughters, Zinnia and Dahlia.

He always felt so lucky to have such friends as Larry and Barb Groves; so, he and Larry could watch sports on TV and the two gals could shop and shop and shop.

His was a life well lived. Rest in peace, my sweet husband.

There was a Celebration of Life at the Range Funeral Home in Virginia, Minnesota, on Wednesday, April 2, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. with visitation at 10:00 a.m. prior to the service.

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The Rude siblings who survive him are Charlene Schachner, Arlo Rude, LaDawn Olson, Charlotte Fillingsness, Candice Tveitbakk, David Rude and Tim Rude. He was preceded in death by his parents, Herman and Beatrice Rude, and siblings Betty Kisch, Carol Lambert, Harlan Rude, and Sharon Corriveau.

Larry was baptized at St. Pauli Church on August 6, 1944 with Mr. and Mrs. Carl (Louise) Alberg and Mr. and Mrs. Theodore (Anna) Bjorge as sponsors.

He was confirmed by Pastor A.E. Berg on April 19, 1959.

Front row left to right: Larry Rude, Valerie Torstveit, Pastor Berg, Dianne Odegaard. Back row left to right: Delores Rolandson, James Weckwerth, Lyle Hanson, Faye Torkelson, Meribeth Folkedahl.





In Memorium

Kenneth "Kenny" Lee

March 22, 1933 – March 13, 2025

Kenny was the uncle of Natalie "Talli" Swanson and David Lee.

Kenneth "Kenny" Lee was born on March 22, 1933, in Beltrami County. He passed away on March 13, 2025 at Warroad Senior Living in Warroad, MN.

Kenneth was the son of Harland and Anna (Hanson) Lee. He was baptized at Northwood Lutheran Church and later served in the U.S. Army from 1954 to 1956. Following his military service, he pursued education in agriculture and carpentry.

A dedicated farmer throughout his life, Kenneth also worked for the Minnesota Highway Department from 1966 until his retirement in 1991. He took great pride in his work and enjoyed spending time outdoors. Whether maintaining his car, working out on the farm, fixing farm equipment, or riding his snowmobile, he found joy in hands-on tasks and being in nature.

Kenneth's memory will be cherished by those who knew him. May his legacy bring comfort to all who remember him.

Kenneth is survived by brothers, Vernon of Bemidji, MN, Gerald (Betty) of Grand Marais, MN, Leland (Carol) of St. Cloud, MN; sister, Jeanne Brenna of Cloquet, MN; many nieces, nephews, great-nieces, great-nephews, relatives, and friends.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brothers: Earl, Harland, George, and Ralph; sisters: Cerise Swanson, Judith Kotrba, and Delilah Anderson; nephews: Lynn Lee, Ernest and Keith Anderson, Charles Brenna, and Mike Nelson; niece Rhonda Mastey; brothers-in-law: Theodore Anderson, Donald Swanson, Russell Brenna, and Duane Kotrba; sisters-in-law: LaVonne Lee, Myrtle Lee, and Arlene Lee.

The graveside service to honor Kenneth Lee will be held on July 12, 2025, 9:00 a.m. at Northwood Cemetery, Northwood Township, Beltrami County, MN.

Condolences may be sent at www.johnsonfuneralservice.com. Memorials are preferred to Northwood Cemetery Fund or Grace Lutheran Church.

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Minutes of the Church Council

February 13, 2025

The St. Pauli Lutheran Church council held its monthly meeting on Thursday, February 13, 2025 at St. Pauli Church. Members present included Faye Auchenpaugh, Wade Benson, Sue Kotz, Jana Johnson and guest Kevin Reich.

Council President Faye Auchenpaugh called the meeting to order at 7:00pm. Kevin Reich opened the meeting with a prayer.

Approval of Agenda: The agenda was reviewed and approved. M/S/C (Benson/Kotz)

Secretary's Report: M/S/C (Kotz/Benson) to approve the Secretary's report for January 2025.

Treasurer's Report: M/S/C (Johnson/Kotz) to approve the Treasurer's report for January.

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|--|-------------------|
| Checking Account Balance End of Dec 2024 | \$33,550.23 |
| Jan 2025 Revenue | 2,110.00 |
| Jan 2025 Expenses | <u>(3,224.03)</u> |

| | |
|--|------------------|
| Checking Account Balance End of Jan 2025 | \$32,436.20 |
| Other Account Balances End of Jan 2025 | |
| Education Fund | \$554.30 |
| Edward Jones | 83,978.02 |
| Memorial Fund | 8,752.91 |
| Mission Grant | 5,698.16 |
| Savings | <u>38,912.43</u> |
| Total Account Balances End of Jan 2025 | \$170,332.02 |

Cemetery Association Funds End of Jan 2025 \$78,877.12

Pastor's Report: Kevin requested a transfer of membership from Bethany to St. Pauli. Sheila will remain a Bethany member. Kevin presented his schedule for March and April, as follows:

March 2 - Sunday Worship - Kevin
March 5 - 7pm Ash Wednesday Service w/communion - Kevin
March 9 - Sunday Worship - Kevin
March 12 - Lent Service - Kevin

March 16 - Sunday Worship - P. Marilyn Grafstrom
 March 19 - Lent Service - Written message will be provided by Kevin
 March 23 - Sunday Worship - Kevin
 March 26 - Lent Service - Kevin
 March 30 - Sunday Worship - Kevin
 April 2 - Lent Service - Kevin
 April 6 - Sunday Worship - Kevin
 April 9 - Lent Service - Written message provided by Kevin
 April 13 - Sunday Worship - Kevin
 April 18 - Good Friday Service - Kevin
 April 20 - 8:00 am Easter Morning Worship w/communion
 April 27 - Sunday Worship - P. Marilyn Graftsrom

Other Reports:

WELCA - Sue Kotz reported that the WELCA quilters sewed 8 quilts in one day and also made and delivered 27 packages including individual pot pies and homemade Valentine's. Eighteen deliveries were made.

Board of Education - no report this month

Old Business:

The Council had a follow-up discussion about purchasing a generator. Jim received a bid from Clearbrook Electric for a 18KW unit. Kevin made the recommendation to also get a bid

for a 10KW unit. Faye will follow-up with Jim in asking for a second bid from Clearbrook on a 10KW unit as well as a bid from Red Lake Electric on both.

New Business:

1. A recommendation and motion was made to add Council President to the bank account. M/S/C (Johnson, Kotz)
2. Shark vacuum brushes are worn out. WELCA is looking into replacement brushes instead of replacing the entire vacuum.
3. One of the stove burners went out while WELCA ladies were making pot pies. Janet Strandlie talked with Rick's Appliances who recommended replacing the entire stove due to its age. Janet also called Skalsky Electric, and he thinks he can find the part to fix it.
4. Faye handed out job responsibilities from bylaws for each Council office. She asked everyone to review and familiarize themselves.

Next Meeting: Thursday, March 20 at 7:00 pm.

The meeting closed with the Lord's Prayer and adjourned at 7:47pm.

Jana Johnson
 St. Pauli Church Council Secretary

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Minutes of the Women of the ELCA

February 11, 2025

The St. Pauli Women of the ELCA met on February 11, 2025 at 3:00 pm at the church with 7 members present following a full day of quilting.

President Jan opened with devotions "Confidence and Calm" based on John 16:33.

Secretary's Report: Minutes of the January meeting were read.

Treasurer's Report: January 16, 2025 to February 11, 2025: Income: \$329.00; Expenses \$365.30. Checking account balance: \$1,112.64. Savings balance as of January 31, 2025 \$601.06. CD balance as of 12-31-2024: \$6,542.94.

Kathy moved to approve both secretary and treasurer reports, Sue seconded. Carried.

Stewardship: Eight quilts were made today, and Faye is taking home two baby quilts that we will donate to VIP. Kathy spent the \$21 remaining on the Thrivent card at the consignment store on infant clothing. LWR wants quilts 60x80 size with no use of fiberglass or polar fleece (which we do not). Per the latest instructions from LWR, each fabric kit should include the following: 2 spools of neutral-colored, general-purpose thread, 250-300 yards each; 2 pieces of cotton or cotton-blend fabric (no knits of 100% polyester). Each piece should match one of the following sizes: 2
 ¼ yards of 60" wide fabric, 3 yards of 44" wide fabric, 4 yards of 36" wide fabric.

LWR is sending a lot of quilts and health kits to U.S. disaster locations, e.g. hurricane in the southeast.

Kathy got a Thrivent card to defray the costs of our Valentine's Day meals, which we will make and distribute tomorrow.

Council report: No meeting in January, so no report.

Communications: Thank you letters and cards were received from the NW MN Snow (\$60 for gathering and unit offerings); family of Marvin Torkelson; Heritage Center; Prowler Pantry; ELCA for our Thankoffering, scholarship fund and ELCA Good Gifts donations; Northland Rescue; and family of Skip Swanson.

Old Business:

Wall hanging: The Heritage Center dinner has been changed to March 3rd, but Jan has not received any invitations yet. We will invite the two ladies from the frame shop. Faye read the letter from Karmon Tron vet, executive director of the Hartz Foundation, in which she attached the formal application. Grant boards don't meet until May or after.

New Business:

Vacuum: Virginia will check with Don's Repair to see if the worn brushes can be replaced.

Stove: The large burner on one of our kitchen stoves no longer works. Rick's Appliance said he can't get parts. Jan will call Skalsky to get his opinion. Will also be brought up at the Council meeting this Thursday. Sue will check on prices for a new stove.

Next meeting: April 23, 3:00 pm, with Faye Auchenpaugh, hostess. The Lord's Prayer was prayed and prayer partners exchanged. Meeting adjourned.

Faye Auchenpaugh, Secretary

We were fortunate to hear two excellent sermons two Sundays in a row.

Pastor Marilyn's Sermon

Sunday, March 16, 2025 lectionary readings: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18, Psalm 27, Luke 13:31-35

I just noticed this time around that it was the Word of the Lord that came to Abram in a vision and that is a huge and compelling observation that has great bearing for us. Because great visions and visitations from the Lord are rare in this time.

And if we are not accessing the Word of the Lord that is as ubiquitous as the phones that rarely leave our hands, we are missing out on the great and transformative Word that can shape our lives, make us brave, and help us to live as if we believe in rewards that go beyond our paycheck, the lottery, and human approval.

It is in that Word that the Lord is with us now. Jesus, Word made flesh imparted His Holy Spirit into the Words of Scripture and into our hearts and when they meet on a consistent basis, amazing and powerful things happen, more than we can anticipate or imagine. The Word of the Lord, the Truth within us, takes on a life of its own.

When the Word of the Lord met Abram as described in our Genesis passage, Abram was well over 90, and this was the 3rd time the Lord had come to him in some way or another promising a child. Right. Abram stated the obvious: "Lord, I continue childless." For us this plea might be "Lord, I continue broke." Or "Lord, my kids still struggle." Or "Lord, my body is still failing." "Lord, I have not received what I have been praying for." We are confused and can't even begin to understand how God can keep reminding us of promises that He does not appear to be willing or able to deliver on.

"Look to the heavens and count the stars, if you are able, Abram. So shall your descendants be." And Abram believed the Lord. And the Lord turned his belief into righteousness and changed his name. The Lord literally turned Abram's belief into Christ, whose human person descended from Abram's tired frame.

But it took a long and heart wrenching time. Time that included battles and blessings, conflicts and confirmations. Abram and Sarai did, as in a defiance of nature, God's prerogative, ultimately have a child and they, along with their community celebrated. Just imagine the baby shower! Party on, God has answered our prayers. Awesome. Done. Isaac delivered and tied with a bow.

Not so much. When Isaac was 13 the same God who defied nature to provide this precious son to Abraham, asked Abraham to sacrifice His only Son. And Abraham, because of his believe that the great story didn't end with him, was willing to obey God even when God didn't make sense and obedience hurt like crazy.

Well, the sacrifice of Isaac didn't happen. Isaac didn't have to die because in the nick of time God provided a ram in a thicket, a foreshadowing of God's only Son, who, on that same mountain, would be sacrificed to rescue us all from sin and death.

Hebrews 11 says that by faith Abraham and Sarah received a son because they regarded the One who had promised as trustworthy. And Abraham was willing to sacrifice that son because He trusted that God was able to raise his Son from the dead. God also promised Abraham a land and descendants like the number of stars in the sky, one of Whom would bless the whole earth.

Abraham died without seeing those promises yet saw them from a distance and welcomed them and acknowledged that he was a foreigner on the earth. He aspired for a better land, his true homeland, a heavenly one, a city that God prepared for him.

We don't have even a sliver of the view that God enjoys, over generations and geography. We don't have the capacity to fathom the immaculate plan that is "Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be Done, on earth as it is in heaven." Or the immaculate plan that is "Deliver us from evil."

Because another bodacious baby shower happened generations later when the also-barren Elizabeth and Zechariah were promised a long prayed for child. John the Baptist, announcer of Jesus.

Around the same time, God, who dares us to try and constrain His ways, again defied convention and chose a poor teenage girl to be the unwed mother of Abraham's descendant, God's long awaited only Son. Sacrificed on the same mountain of Isaac's near miss to deliver humanity from evil in the fulness of time.

And oh, my goodness, God did raise Jesus from the dead. Party on. Messianic promise delivered and tied it with a bow.

Yet still we wait. Through battles and blessings, conflicts and confirmations, we wait. And God counts our belief, our waiting, as righteousness. The righteousness of Christ.

Even when it's ugly. Even when we falter and go our own way for a time, even when we suffer from pain or impatience-induced memory lapses as to the sure promises of God.

The Word of God gives us hope that helps us wait. You see, real faith happens when we read or hear the Word of God and push back a little. Pastor, you keep talking about this great and eternal promise of reward, but it feels totally irrelevant to my life. Yep, Abraham too. Sarah too. Isaac too. Mary too. Me too.

Look to the heavens and count the stars, my friends. The same God who spoke the heavens and the stars into being, the God who said "Let there be light" sent Jesus Christ of Nazareth to shine His light and truth into our hearts to help us believe that God is trustworthy, and that God loves us. Through battles and blessings, conflicts and confirmations, heartaches and happiness.

When the LORD is our light and our salvation, whom shall we fear? When the LORD is the stronghold of our lives, of whom shall we be afraid? Jesus calls us, compels us to believe through the power of the Holy Spirit. To be strong and wait for the Lord to complete His long-range plan to usher in His Kingdom on earth, and to deliver us from the evil within us and around us.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy, my blessing, stand firm in the Lord. Let us passionately engage in precious dialogue with the Word of Lord. And God will turn our dialogue into the righteousness of Christ.

Amen, let it be so. Thanks be to God.

Benediction: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Kevin Reich's Sermon

Sunday, March 23, 2025 based on Luke 13:1-9

¹At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way, they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?" ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. ⁴Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?" ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did." ⁶Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' ⁸He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

When one reads these two parables, the parable of repentance and the parable of the barren fig tree, one may think, there is no commonality with these two parables. But in reality, they do speak to the very same thing – repentance.

Often, I do not understand the logic of the schedule of the lectionary. One wonders, what is the rationale for the order of the lectionary? Last week we looked at the last five verses of the 13th chapter of Luke and this week we look at the first nine verses. We don't read the Bible backwards; why do we preach on it backwards? I am sure I will never know the answer. We will continue to tread forward, using the lectionary as it is outlined.

When one reflects on the message of today's two parables, one realizes how they fit into the season of Lent. This text stresses the urgency of repentance and getting aligned with the Kingdom of God. It illustrates the urgency to repent but yet it also makes it known God does have patience for his people. Repentance should be done sooner than later, because we do not know when the end is coming. But yet we are made aware that even an unproductive fig tree gets another chance to prove its fertility.

We are not to delay getting our lives in order with God, but on the other hand we do have some time of temporary postponement.

People questioned Jesus about the degree of sin. They mentioned Galileans who had lost their lives due to the wicked ways of Pilate. We are not made aware of the incident in detail. We do know Pilate was a strict Roman leader who often took judgement into his own hands, killing suspected criminals without any trial.

There is a story of Pilate wanting to build a channel to direct water from the Pools of Solomon to Jerusalem. To assist in paying for the construction, he demanded money from the temple treasury which outraged some of the priests and Jewish people. The Jews sent a delegation to ask for the money to be returned. Pilate sent soldiers into the crowd, dressed as common people, and upon signal, these soldiers

drew their knives, killing many of the Jews asking for return of the money. This is how Pilate often operated.

People asked Jesus if those who lost their lives are any worse sinners than any of the other Galilean Jews? Jesus makes reference to two disasters that were well known to the people at the time: The slaying of the innocent Jews, by an act of man, and the 18 who died when the tower in Siloam fell upon them and killed them, a natural disaster.

Human nature is to view some people as good and some people as bad. In this thought process we may be guilty of thinking good things should happen to good people and bad things to bad people. Jesus corrects the people in this thought process. He doesn't say that one group or the other was less innocent or more guilty. He makes it clear that all are guilty of sin. We all have heard of a wicked person falling and dying but also of a good person falling to their death.

In the novel, *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe*, George Eliot, pen name of Mary Ann Evans, tells the story of Molly, an opium-addicted woman. She plans to make her way to a party to reveal some unethical things, unknown about her, to those at the party. On the way to the party, Molly takes opium, collapses in the snow and dies as a result of the cold. A fictional story but an example of a known sinner dying.

On the contrary, in August of 1996, Gary Purath of Red Lake Falls, and his daughter Robyn, were enroute to the Farm Fest "96", as Robyn was to represent the Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association as the state's beef queen. As they were traveling south on Hwy 32, their car was t-boned north of Rollag on the passenger side. Robyn was sleeping in the passenger seat and lost her earthly life at the early age of 18. A true story and an example of an innocent child of God experiencing a sudden unexpected death.

In analyzing the issue at hand, Jesus turns the focus from the question, why did this happen, to the question, what does this mean? It means we do not know when we are going to die; therefore, repentance must be a top priority in our lives. Neither the Jews who lost their lives to Pilate nor the people who were crushed by the toppling of the tower expected to die when they did. Because our time of death is unknown, we must be repentant.

The Jesus in this story is very pointed. He is not like the Jesus many want today. In today's world many want Jesus to be soft, gentle, and kind. To speak charming parables and comforting phrases and gather his children unto himself in a peaceful way. This is not the Jesus we hear in this parable. He is straightforward.

As previously mentioned, often we divide people into the good guys in Jesus' camp or the bad guys outside his camp. What Jesus is telling us is whether good or bad, eventually we all fall into the same camp. There was a reason for the incarnate Lord to be present on earth. We all need what Jesus came to offer: grace unto forgiveness.

There is a scene in the rather disturbing film "Unforgiven," where a young gunslinger shakes in his boots after killing a

man for the first time. In an attempt to justify the shooting, the young man says, "Well, I reckon he had it coming." The old gray-haired gunslinger, played by Clint Eastwood responds, "We all got it coming, kid."

Jesus is pointing to the fact we are not to do finger pointing and trying to rate sinfulness in others. The so-called bad person does not need to come with a wheelbarrow load of repentance and the so-called good person with only a shovel full of repentance. Repentance is repentance. It is all the same for everyone, just like the divine solution and response is the same for everyone – forgiveness.

Following the warning that we all must repent, Jesus uses the parable of the fig tree to illustrate principles of judgement. The first point is rather obvious: God looks for fruit. The fruit we bear shows what kind of person we are.

An apple tree bears apples, it does not bear tomatoes. If Jesus is truly in our lives, it will be apparent by the fruit we bear. Sometimes it takes a while for that fruit to be noticeable. Are we bearing God's fruit?

We may ask, what kind of fruit is God looking for from us? If we read Galatians 5:22-23, we are told, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." God is looking for the fruit of the Spirit.

The man in the parable illustrates the patience of God in judgement. He is willing to give the tree, you and me, a second chance. He also illustrates that God does not leave the tree alone on its own. He provides special care in hopes of it to bear fruit. God provides fertilizer for the tree enabling it to begin bearing fruit.

But we are made aware God will be just in his judgement. He is not going to continue to fertilize our lives in hopes we bear fruit. Sooner or later the day of reckoning will come. We must eventually begin to bear fruit. We must be ready as we do not know when that day of reckoning will be.

William Barclay was a Scottish author, Church of Scotland minister, and popular theologian. He wrote a popular set

of Bible commentaries on the New Testament. Barclay drew several wise points of application to this parable:

- Uselessness invites disaster.
- If something only takes, it will not survive.
- God gives second chances.
- There is one final chance.

In the Greek text of Luke 13:8 when the servant tells the vineyard owner to "leave it alone," the Greek is the word *aphes*, which is the root word from which we get forgiveness and is the same as Luke 11:4's presentation of the phrase in the Lord's Prayer "forgive our sins." It may not be wrong to see the servant's words in Luke 13 as meaning not just "leave it alone" in the sense of doing nothing to the fruitless tree but also meaning "forgive it" for its fruitlessness. Those of us who do repent of our prior fruitlessness know that we are never perfect. We do not become fruit bearing and never need fertilizer again. There is always the need for God to forgive us and give us another chance.

This gospel text is so appropriate for Lent. There are times we are guilty of viewing and questioning others' problems instead of looking in the mirror at our own shortcomings. We are not to compare ourselves to the good or the bad. We are instructed by the gospel to compare ourselves with only one other person, namely Jesus. We are to come on bended knee.

We are to let the Holy Spirit cultivate in us the fruit of the same Spirit that will help us display the glory of our God.

As we pray each Sunday and many other times throughout the week: "Our Father, forgive us our sins."

Heavenly Father, we know we are to bear good fruit, fruit of the Holy Spirit. We ask for forgiveness when we do not bear that fruit. But sometimes we need to be fertilized so that we can continue to bear the fruit. Provide that fertilizer when we are in need, giving us another chance. AMEN!

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After LA fires destroyed places of worship, Methodist, Muslim and Jewish congregations form 'an island of grace'

Lynda Lin Grigsby in Altadena, California, 25 March 2025

After disaster struck, all three faiths are worshiping under the same roof, forming a microcosm of peaceful coexistence.

Entering a sacred space like the First United Methodist church in Pasadena can stir emotions. Curious visitors often wander through the church doors, attracted by its gothic exterior, and instinctively start to whisper.

The space on Colorado Boulevard – a busy thoroughfare that doubles as part of the Rose Parade route every New Year's Day – has always felt holy, said the Rev Amy Aitken, the



The First Methodist Episcopal church in Pasadena, California, sometime in the early 1900s. Photograph: University of Southern California/Corbis/Getty Images

pastor. Now she wants it to feel like a safe space for two other religious groups that are sharing the facilities for worship: the Islamic Center of Southern California and the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center.

Conflicts in faraway lands and ideological differences make these three religious groups unlikely cohabitants in a shared space, but here the groups form a microcosm of peaceful coexistence united by tragedy. In January, the Pasadena synagogue burned down in the Eaton fire leaving its Jewish congregation in need of a place to grieve and worship.

The Methodist church, already a host to Islamic Center members as a satellite worship location, welcomed the Jewish congregation.

"We are trying to cultivate an 'island of grace' in the midst of differences that we are told should divide us," said Aitken.

Under this arrangement, all three Abrahamic faiths are worshipping under one roof at 500 East Colorado Boulevard.

"I can't think of another church that can say the same," said Aitken.

'You won't feel good if your neighbor is suffering'

Midday on a Friday in February, Islamic Center members lay out prayer rugs in the church's Fellowship Hall for their weekly Jumma service, a communal prayer session.

"Friday is our religious day," said Roohi Siddiqi, who has been attending Jumma services here for two years. For her, it's a weekly chance for spiritual renewal.



The Islamic Center of Southern California in Los Angeles, on 10 April 2023. Photograph: Myung J Chun/Los Angeles Times/Getty Images

The service lasts just an hour, and the Islamic Center's Mosque and cultural center is more than 13 miles away in Los Angeles. This satellite location in Pasadena provides a convenient site for local members to worship, said Omar Ricci, an Islamic Center spokesperson.

It's an interfaith partnership forged out of Steelers Nation.

In 2017, Dr Rizwan Bhatti, an ophthalmologist and former board member of the Islamic Center, connected with a patient – a former Methodist church pastor – through their mutual interest in the Pittsburgh Steelers. Bhatti was helping in the search for a satellite location for the center's weekly prayer service. The church's meeting room was available. That summer, the first Jumma prayer service was held at the Methodist church.

"The church is not just a space of worship," said Bhatti. "It's a place of connection between interfaith partners."

Now, there is a third partner.

"It's just a great blessing for the entire community that people with different faiths are able to come together and help each other in difficult times," said Bhatti.

The arrangement reminds Ricci of a quote by the Irish writer Sebastian Barry: "There is seldom a difficulty with religion where there is friendship."

"Yes, there are differences in belief systems in what's happening between Palestine and Israel," said Ricci. "It doesn't override the loving demeanor that I think we should be dealing with each other."

On this day, the Islamic Center's Khutbah, or lecture, focused on unity – both within their community and now with the new Jewish group that share the same space, but at different times.

After the Jumma service, Dr Syeda Ali, a kidney specialist, said the message resonated.

"No matter how you reach out to your creator, we all have a common goal of doing the best for the community," said Ali. "We want our families to be good. We want our community to be good. You won't feel good if your neighbor is suffering."

'We are people that play well with others'

"The church's campus – with its meeting rooms, sanctuary, chapel and a restaurant-grade kitchen – is a place of God," said the Rev Mina Nau-Mahe, an associate pastor. "And so, if it is a space of God, then it needs to be open to all people."

Now the campus is full, which calls for a lot of coordination between the groups – and a lot of grace, said Aisha Williams, the facilities manager. This also applies to church members, who are accustomed to having the entire campus to themselves.

The Methodist congregation was overjoyed when they learned that the Jewish Temple congregants were worshipping on the same campus, said Aitken. "We are people that play well with others."



Interfaith partners Aisha Williams, Rev Mina Nau-Mahe and Dr Rizwan Bhatti. Photograph: Lynda Lin Grigsby

Fridays are especially busy. Jumma services take place at midday. In the evening, the campus buzzes with Shabbat

services. On Saturday mornings, the Jewish temple holds its service in the sanctuary, a cavernous room with fan vault ceilings where the cantor's voice soars. Kids giggle in the pews while parents have personal moments of prayer.

Then on Sunday mornings, the home team takes the space.

"I think that this has been such a great reminder that all faith communities have the same goal. It is to support and make ourselves better humans, so that we can make the world just a little bit better together," said Melissa Levy, Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center (PJTC) executive director.

Where do you see God in all this?

The Jewish temple held services the same week the synagogue burned down. They needed to nourish their beleaguered community. More than 70 of their families were affected by the Eaton fire, including Heather Sandoval Feng, a high school principal, whose Altadena home burned down.

After two months, Sandoval Feng has settled into the phase she describes as the "temporary permanent" – the quiet space after the disaster that allows the mind to reckon with the loss and the unexpected beauty of finding a new interfaith community.

Her daughter Hannah Sandoval, 13, had been preparing for her batmitzvah before the fire took their family home and synagogue. The Methodist church offered its space for the rite of passage. A month after the fire, Hannah ceremoniously read from the Torah scroll – which were saved from the ravages of the blaze – in front of the congregation and a stained-glass window depicting the transfiguration of Christ.

"I couldn't think of a better place," said Sandoval Feng. It was the first batmitzvah for the church and the interfaith family – Hannah's dad, Oscar Sandoval, is Catholic. For months now, their family has been returning to the site of their home to pick through remnants. A broken mug emblazoned with the Star of David here. Charred Hanukah decorations there.

Kids at Sandoval Feng's school often ask: "Where do you see God in all this?"

Her answer: "God is the community in action."

During Ramadan this month, a holy time for Muslims to fast, pray and reflect, members of the Islamic Center gather at the church on Tuesday nights to break their fast together. Church members have previously joined them.

Interfaith outreach between all the groups will happen in time, said Aitken. For now, she's giving the Jewish congregation grace and space to settle in.

"It's a big deal for them to be worshipping in a Christian space," said Aitken about PJTC. "And it's enough."

The arrangement is an opportunity to practice compassion.

"I don't know how to change things on the global macro level," she said. "But on this corner, I can try to create a kind of community and a house of worship that God would recognize."

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The Real Luxuries in Life

- time
- health
- a quiet mind
- slow mornings
- ability to travel
- rest without guilt
- a good night's sleep
- calm and "boring" days
- meaningful conversations
- home-cooked meals
- people you love
- people who love you back.

* * * * *

Your help is needed for the TRF Hanging Baskets project

The Zehlian's Women's Club has stepped up to the plate this year to spearhead hanging flower baskets in Thief River. Faye Auchenpaugh is on the committee, and they need both funds and volunteers. The cost to sponsor a basket is \$75, which covers the cost of the plants, soil for 16" pots with hangers, watering cart maintenance, watering cart gas, and daily watering with fertilizer. If you feel you're unable to donate monetarily, we need volunteers to water for the months of August and September (one to drive the 4-wheeler, one to water baskets). We would really appreciate your watering one evening a week.

The goal is to purchase 120 baskets. If we raise any extra funds this year, they will be used to purchase new baskets for next year (the current ones have been in use for at least ten years and the fiber liners are getting worn out).

The Zehlians are a 501(c)(3) organization, so your donations are tax-deductible. Sponsor letters are lying on the lectern in the narthex.



The Back Page

As we approach Easter, a time of reflection and renewal, let's pause to acknowledge the profound significance of this Christian holiday: the celebration of Jesus Christ's resurrection, a testament to hope and the triumph of life over death.

Easter is a Celebration of Hope

Easter is a time to rejoice in the promise of a new beginning, a reminder that even in the face of darkness, there is always hope for a brighter future.

The Resurrection of Jesus:

The core of Easter lies in the belief that Jesus, who was crucified, rose from the dead, a pivotal event that forms the foundation of Christian faith.

A Time for Reflection:

Easter encourages us to reflect on our own lives, our relationships, and the values that guide us, prompting us to seek a deeper connection with ourselves and others.

A Time for Joy and Celebration:

As we remember the resurrection, let us embrace the joy and hope that Easter brings, sharing it with our loved ones and celebrating the promise of new beginnings.

