

EPIPHANY – PRAYERS AND STORIES

Epiphany January 6th

If you don't have an Epiphany service

USE THIS ON JANUARY 3RD IN ANTICIPATION OF EPIPHANY, while the story of the wise men is still on people's minds.

Matthew 2:1-12

Synod's 2nd Guiding Principle: Gratitude, Gratitude

Story

from First Lutheran Church, Pasco Pr John Hergert

Pasco at one time had a thriving downtown shopping area surrounded by beautiful old homes where many PFLC members lived. The church was filled with neighbors who sent their children to the same schools and their roots were deeply Scandinavian. Like many downtown areas, the shops closed and moved to the mall, the old small homes once so desirable were traded for larger houses in outlying areas. The church became smaller and there was nothing automatic about filling the pews.

The church community found new life by having a deep ongoing prayerful conversation about caring for one another and sharing. In gratitude for the blessings they enjoyed they found needs in the neighborhood they could meet. The downtown location blossomed into a blessing as it is perfectly placed to do God's gracious work. For nearly a decade, the church has been on a journey to become a beacon of hope bringing gifts. Instead of gold, frankincense and myrrh the people of FLCP wisely bring new sneakers to children headed to school; nearly 500 pair this year. Last summer the church provided breakfast food to 100 neighborhood children who usually rely upon meals at school. Groceries are also provided for the neediest in our midst at Thanksgiving and Christmas. All delivered to their doors by their Lutheran neighbors who see their struggle and respond.

A prayer for people to say during worship:

God of all wisdom, just as the wise men brought gifts to share with the Christ child, we know that you gave your precious Son to us as the greatest gift of all.

May we receive Jesus and all the gifts you give us with gratitude, gratitude.

Help us to grow in our ability to trust that you provide for all our needs. Lead us by your shining light to be generous to congregations and ministries across our Synod. Help us to share our blessings and pay homage to the body of Christ throughout our wider church.

God, your hands are outstretched in loving embrace and blessing. Guide us in our work to be a blessing to others and to carry out your vision to love and serve the world. Amen.

JANUARY 10TH 2011

Baptism of Jesus Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Synod's 5th Guiding Principle: YES! Everybody Come!

Story: Celebration Lutheran Church, East Wenatchee, Pr David Haven

In 1992 when Pr David Haven began at Celebration, it was defined as a Redevelopment congregation. Change was expected and even desired. Intentionally focusing on basic Christian principles – worship, education, hospitality, and outreach – members gained confidence inviting others to be part of this ministry. They reached out by providing space for support groups, tutors, and cooking classes for those in need. They grew a community garden which bears fruit (and vegetables) in abundance for the community and members alike. It took time for leaders to emerge. They have steadily grown as more people have felt welcomed and fed. Pr Dave strives to have a one-to-one relationship with his members. One Lent he called every family in the congregation for a conversation on the phone. The faith stories he heard were so fascinating, that the next year he paired up all the family units in the congregation and invited them to call each other to have one-to-one conversations regarding their faith stories. All the baptized have a role and a place.

Prayer: Jesus, our Lord, you were once baptized and now you welcome everyone into the baptismal waters. It is there that we were joined with you forever, and to each other as sisters and brothers in Christ. Help us to support each other and be a blessing to each other. Grant us the desire to live out our baptism in communion with all Christians across our Synod. Give us the desire and the courage to welcome those who do not know you, into Your church family. You welcome all sinners, and provide for us. Help us to extend hospitality to all who need to know your love, and who crave the food that fills us eternally. May we be attentive to all who cross our path. *People are hungry, and one good word is bread for a thousand.* (from a fabulous David Whyte poem "Loaves and Fishes") Amen.

JANUARY 17TH 2011

John 2:1-11

Our Synod's 4th Guiding Principle: Miracles of Hope!

Story: Zion Lutheran Church, Deer Park Pr Duane Anderson

Conflict, even conflict with former pastors, had led many people to leave Zion Lutheran. But a core group remained that were committed to both the congregation and mission. They would raise the question, "What is best for the folks that might come here?" The congregation prepared to witness to the visitors and the unchurched. The leaders attended a retreat in the Dave Daubert style from the book "Living Lutheran". There was a recommitment to prayer, including a Bible study group writing the prayer petitions for Sunday worship. There was a commitment made to outreach, and youth ministry. With the congregation growing in its stewardship practices and generosity, they moved from being in debt to being able to extend Pr Duane from half-time to three-quarters time and to once again send mission support to the Synod.

Prayer for Sunday

Oh God nothing is impossible with you. When we participate in your purposes there is no giving up, because at any time something new might happen. Even when we have lost people we love, friends and family from the church and in life, we start over with your strength and hope. We miss the way things used to be, and we don't know what to hope for. All we know is that you draw us into your future, and that alone gives us all we need. Thank you for our partners in ministry across the synod and church-wide, who sustain us and remind us of the story of your Son Jesus, who is with us always till the end of the age. Amen.

January 24TH 2011

Luke 4:14-21

Synod's 1st Guiding Principle: Jesus: First, Last, Always

Story: St. Luke Lutheran Church, Spokane Pr Jim Johnson, Youth Director Tyler Strom

St Luke is a church that strives to use their full potential and bless the world. Several teams read the book *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. It is the desire of the church to do whatever they do really well, discover their passion, and to provide opportunities for ministry. For this reason they took their time and great care to discern their Mission, Purpose and Vision! They waited patiently for direction from God.

Their mission statement came right away, since it is God's mission they were naming: "Worship God, Walk in the Spirit, & Witness to Christ".

However, discerning their own purpose and vision within the context of their community took them 9 years! For 9 years they met on an ongoing basis to listen to what God would have them do; the reason for their existence. This meant everyone was able to get on board. Here is what they discovered:

Our Purpose at St. Luke is to: Build Community by
Being passionate about the message of grace,
Bringing Jesus to all ages,
Connecting people to God and one another.

Our vision at St. Luke is to: Revitalize the Lutheran Church and celebrate our Lutheran faith in Christ in the community.

Now their congregation may need to build a larger sanctuary to make room for the growth and to be able to offer the quality of worship that will appeal to young families.

Prayer:

Jesus you are the First and the Last to love us. You invite us to use our gifts all our lives for the sake of your world. May we be disciplined in all aspects of our lives so that by your power and leading we may not be good, so much as great followers of You. How great thou art, O Lord our God. Your greatness precedes us and draws us into your future. May we participate in your Vision to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to all who are captive, and in bondage to sin. Pour out your Holy spirit upon us, anoint us so that we can proclaim recovery of sight to those who are blind to your great future. Remind us to hope in your purposes as we seek to participate in them across the synod and the nation. God's work, our hands. Jesus, First, Last and Always. Amen.

January 31st 2011

Luke 4:21-30

Synod's 6th Guiding Principle: Come, Lord Jesus

Story: Christ Lutheran Church, Walla Walla Pr Joel Ley

Christ Lutheran is ministering to those outside of their congregation in creative ways. People from the congregation have been encouraged in their desire to serve "outsiders" in need, like the widow at Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian, by being assured that it is okay if not every ministry initiative works out. Their fears of failure and criticism are ebbing away, and as a result three new ministry starts are thriving.

The ministers at Christ Lutheran in Walla Walla have been inspired to provide a parents night out for those with foster children. They serve families not only in their corner of Washington but also a few in a neighboring Oregon county. Once a month the parents of as many as 63 foster children get to go out for 4 hours while the people of the church offer the children dinner, games, craft activities, and love.

Christ Lutheran's Vacation Bible School is like a camp where children are fed breakfast and a full lunch and treated to the normal VBS activities at no cost. Their families attend a barbeque and program at the end of the week. Last year one hundred children came from the neighborhood by invitation through mailings, door knocking and other publicity. A third of the children has no church affiliation and gets follow-up invitations to other activities later in the year.

Tabitha's Closet resulted from another church member's impulse for Mission. More than one hundred beautiful prom dresses along with accessories have been donated and are made available for girls from surrounding schools to borrow for formal events. All that is asked is a donation to cover the cost of cleaning. Now the girls in the neighborhood can look as gorgeous on the outside as they are on the inside, as God's beloved daughters.

Prayer:

The kingdom of God is the kingdom of danger and risk, of eternal beginning and of eternal becoming, of opened spirit and of deep realization, the kingdom of holy insecurity. (*Martin Buber*)

Sometimes we are rejected and criticized by people from our own hometown, or the people closest to us, when we fail. It is in our weakness that you come Lord Jesus, especially when we have tried to follow you and failed. Yet we know that some things that are important for us to do, just look like failure. Like hanging on a cross.

By the transforming power of the Holy Spirit give us the courage to reach out to people who are not in our church family; outsiders who need food and love, and joy. Lead us by your guiding light when we are unsure of your purposes for our church. Strengthen our impulse for mission. Remind us to seek the encouragement of our brothers and sisters, sons and daughters throughout our synod and wider church.

Thank you for calling us to new life in ministry, and for urging us to change in spite of our desire to play safe. Come Lord Jesus. You are welcome in our home town. Amen.

February 7TH 2011

Luke 5:1-11

Synod's 3rd Guiding Principle: No Fear! TRANSFORMATION

Story: Lake Chelan Lutheran Church, Chelan Pr Paul Palumbo

Lake Chelan Lutheran Church has a strong emphasis on discipleship. They offer a class called the Adult Catechumenate for people who want to learn all those things that confirmands hear but do not necessarily remember. The difference is that it is geared towards adults who really do want to know about the Lutheran faith, and it is designed for people inside the church and out. Visitors who want to explore their faith in a comprehensive way can take the 2 year long class that is mostly lay led. Everyone gets a sponsor who attends with them. That way people in the church who want to remember why they are Lutheran Christians can take the class too. Church members witness a newcomer learn about their faith, and hear their questions (that many life long Lutherans are embarrassed to ask). It also helps both members and potential members to know how to articulate their faith, and not be afraid to share it. No Fear. Now that's transformation. In the past 3 years 31 visitors or community members have taken the class.

Prayer:

Jesus you called your disciples and you call us too. Somehow we think we can just be your admirers and we forget that you called us for a reason. As your followers we are afraid to offend others or that we won't have the right words to share our faith. We are afraid to risk our friendships by talking about you. Jesus, you know we have heard people who force their beliefs on others. With Simon Peter we also want to say "Go away from me, Lord, for I am sinful". And you reassure us with your words "Do not be afraid". No Fear, Transformation is what we need.

O Lord there are so many reasons we are afraid to be your disciples. Help us to remember your calling to us; that we are blessed so that we are a blessing to others. Help us to go forth with the power of the Holy Spirit, boldly delivering your message of mercy and hope to the world. We are disciples together with the people of Lake Chelan and all over the synod. May we learn from our rich heritage of faith in the church and from people outside the church too.

Help us to leave behind everything that stops us from catching the next wave of people who need to hear about the good news of your love.

Any Sunday in Epiphany – use this if you are the congregation whose story is told around the synod i.e. you won't need to tell your own,

Or,

If you would prefer to use this story to substitute for any of the others

Story: Lutheran Church of the Master, Pasco Pr. Karen Bates Olson

A year ago Lutheran Church of the Master, Pasco was not sure if they had a future. Their Pastor took their leaders to Transformational Ministry training 4 years ago, and they have steadily been on the path of Transformation. These leaders have been the nerve center of this church.

They were hit badly by the storm of conflict and several people left following the ELCA vote on sexuality. They stood up to the storm and kept their eyes fixed on Jesus even as they began to sink. But now, the spirit of the church is well and truly alive. People are sharing their testimonies of faith with passion, gratitude and tears. If you need to hear about the love of Jesus, this church can tell it.

A couple who were recently led to be part of the life of LCM and are natural leaders, have spoken openly of grace poured out their gay family member. The church is living with their differences: self defined and connected. This church is bearing fruit.

They have redecorated their narthex in a stunning way. They have continued to reach out to the community of Pasco with many boxes of food. They offer an exercise program for members. They host "Our Babies Can't wait" a support program for first time mothers who are single.

With a grant from the legacy of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Richland that closed its doors and offered its assets to other ELCA churches in the Tri-Cities, LCM has opened its doors to a community children's choir. "Grace Notes" is for children who want to sing in a choir. Church members lead it, and the children have already performed around town.

Transformation is real. It does not come easily. Often the people at LCM don't even see the miracles of hope. But for them Jesus always comes first, last and always.