

St. Matthew Newsletter

Our Vision: Connecting the world with Jesus Christ

Our Mission: Faithfully living as the Body of Christ, and sharing the Gospel that brings salvation

❖ Pastor's Message

Rev. Craig Otto

We Are Really Different

When visitors arrive Sunday morning at St. Matthew, they walk into an unfamiliar setting.

Greeters extend hands, ushers provide a printed order of worship, and they enter a peak-ceiling space with wooden bench seating. People here sit next to each other, divided only by an occasional hymnal, purse, or diaper bag. A huge wooden cross dominates the front area, and there is furniture with some kind of fence to divide that space.

“Why are those men wearing robes and green scarves? Why is that girl dressed in a white robe?” A visitor may not be familiar with a churchy church. He may wonder: “What kind of place have I walked into? What do they do here? Why do these people come? You mean people actually bother coming to church—even in today’s world?”

It is a commonly held view that religious faith was a way less-educated people understood the world.

To the visitor, especially one not raised in a Christian home, attending worship is like observing an era that *used to be*. It’s like walking through a museum with old paintings of kings (irrelevant to their lives today) or like touring a one-room school house thinking, “That’s amazing little first-graders were doing school with eighth-graders, same teacher in the same room. That doesn’t happen now.”

So why don’t we just make church an open lobby with small cafeteria tables where people can sit and visit and check their phones? Can’t you order any food here? Why don’t we play overhead pop music through a speaker, bond over a few shared thoughts about doing good and getting along, then go out for lunch somewhere? *Why isn’t this like everywhere else we go?*

Visitors are not sure they can accept religious views as having any bearing on themselves.

This is a pertinent discussion. There is reason to listen to visitors’ honest questions, in this time when many Americans are saying, “Why would I ever find myself in a church? There’s no need. It’s not my scene and won’t ever be.” We are living among neighbors who hope there’s meaning to life and are comfortable with their point of view. Their guiding narrative is the sum of their experience, and many describe life as “it is what it is.”

It is out of love for these neighbors that we remain so different.

- *For their sake* we gather to hear the Bible read out loud. We learn over a lifetime, and invite others to learn what the Bible teaches by hearing it themselves.
- Visitors are often invited by a friend or relative, and upon arriving hear unfamiliar words. As we use Biblical phrases, visitors can learn the proper use of them—that is, they see how Christians pray, learn, and find unity in an historic, unchanged faith passed down four thousand years.

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- We confess we are sinners in need of forgiveness... and by saying this aloud, the visitor may also consider he needs pardon, for a host of reasons.
- Our Pastor announces that God is full of grace, and he declares us forgiven of our sins... so the visitor hears absolution of his guilt—perhaps for the first time.

As Lutheran Christians, our Sundays are consistent with first century Sabbath gatherings.

Jewish families met together for public reading of the law, prophets, and writings (*the Old Testament*), for the singing of psalms, and fellowship. They recognized Jesus as the Messiah written about in these Scriptures. His presence as a public teacher and healer elicited respect, curiosity, even argument among those gathered.

After his crucifixion, Jesus' body was laid in a tomb Friday evening so his devoted friends could begin Sabbath prayers at sundown. Sunday morning, when they returned with spices and perfumes to finish burial preparations, the tomb was empty... yet that very day Jesus began appearing to his disciples in person, resurrected from death.

From this testimony, that our Lord was raised on the third day, those who witnessed His miracles began gathering on Sundays in synagogues, near rivers, in homes and catacombs. Scriptures were still read, psalms were still sung, and new songs were written to tell others what Jesus had said and done.

How will visitors hear that Jesus is the Son of God, and learn to have faith in Him?

There are many of this generation who have little interest in what we do. We expect them to reject every aspect of the Christian faith—to describe Christians as blind to the realities of our modern world, prejudiced against personal freedoms, and holding worthless fundamentalist doctrines. Some of these friends will visit our church for a funeral, wedding, or regular worship service. *Here, in our ordinary patterns of singing, confessing, listening, and praying for the world, they hear about Jesus Christ.*

C.S. Lewis wrote, “If the younger generation have never been told what Christians say and never heard any arguments in defense of it, then their agnosticism or indifference is fully explained. Yet there is nothing in the nature of the younger generation which incapacitates them for receiving Christianity. If anyone is prepared to tell them, they are apparently ready to hear.”

We continue baptizing during worship services, offering Holy Communion to those who have been instructed, and listening to Scripture. We sing hymns that tell of events in the life of Jesus, and hymns that are prayers of a long-suffering church awaiting deliverance. We will offer our lives in obedience to Jesus Christ. We are one, in practice and belief, with the men, women and children who saw Jesus in the days after He rose from the dead.

This place isn't like everywhere else we go. We are really different—and remain so—for the sake of visitors. Out of love for them we teach, plainly, to believe in God. It is our hope they will stumble upon Jesus when they arrive at St. Matthew, hearing Him proclaimed as their salvation and peace.

Yours in Christ, Pastor Otto

❖ Altar Guild

The Altar Guild members will meet on Saturday, February 9th at 10a in the Library. We will discuss Lent services and the March and April duties list.

❖ Mary Martha Circle

Our circle met on Tues. Jan. 29th. Mindy LeFevre served as our hostess and gave the closing devotion. Pastor Andrews led us in bible study, we had a brief business meeting, and packed 18 Valentine care packages for St. Matthew college students.

Please join us on Tues. Feb. 26th at 7 p.m. in the meeting room of the Family Life Center. There will be a short business meeting to plan future events and a program to be determined. Watch the Sunday bulletins for details.

❖ Lydia Circle

Circle met on Thursday, January 10, and discussed past projects, current and possible projects, and upcoming Society meetings. Our next meeting will be February 14 at **12:00 PM** (instead of 12:30) when we will have our annual Valentine lunch. All members are asked to bring a salad or other dish. Non-members are welcome as well. Pastor Andrews led us in a Bible study of the first three chapters of Genesis that he had begun at our November meeting—fascinating and enlightening.

❖ St. Matthew LWML Society – LUTHERAN WOMEN IN MISSION

We would like to get to know you! Please consider joining us at our quarterly gatherings Sunday, February 24, 2:00 PM and on Saturday, May 4, at 9:00 AM. There will be time to visit and an interesting program. Ladies' Night Out on Thursday, March 28, 7:00 PM will be another opportunity to enjoy friends at St. Matthew and to make new friendships. Mark your calendars and watch for details in the church bulletins.

❖ February Missions Collection (LWML Mite Boxes)

Lutheran Indian Ministries (LIM) is at work in Hawaii with the Kanaka people but they have found that the ministry works best if it is done by Kanaka people so a Kanaka-to-Kanaka program was started. One of the Kanaka men, Clarence, has completed two years of theological training. He is working with LIM to be a witness of God's love to his people, to train new leaders in the faith and to address the spiritual, social and emotional needs of his people. For more information about this grant, go to www.lwml.org/2017-2019-mission-grant-18.

❖ Classics Gathering

Our thanks to Dale and Jean Kobel for hosting Classics in January. Dale did a great job calling the Bingo games. And everyone went home a winner! Interesting: the prizes for Most Wins and Fewest Wins went to ... Don and Ann Wesselschmidt. We won't say who got which. **Coming in February...** we will have Pot Luck Luncheon, followed by ... B U N C O! So bring a favorite dish and join us February 7 at 11:30 here at Church.

❖ A Call to Faithful Worship

Your Presence in Worship Helps Others Who Come to Worship

The season of Epiphany focuses on how God was made manifest in the person of Jesus. The church spends time hearing of Jesus' historic miracles, signs and wonders in the world. It was made plain to all that Jesus was who He said: the only-begotten Son of the Father in the flesh. For "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

It is revealed for all that "to see Jesus is to see the Father." It was manifest *by what He said and by what He did*. These belong together, for "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Jesus is the Word of God in the flesh; that is, He was the embodiment of God's Word.

As we testify to His life, we come worship as we were taught—gathering and giving out of thanks to God. We are called out from the world to be separate, to live according to the Word of God, and to be living disciples who follow Christ—even in today's un-religious, contentious world. *We believe, and so our support for the spread of the Gospel follows, because we desire that all men hear and be saved.*

As James wrote: "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves;" and "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?" Martin Luther reflected on these verses, writing:

"He who does not do these works is a faithless man. He gropes and looks about after faith and good works and knows neither what faith is nor what good works are, though he talks and talks, with many words about faith and good works.

"Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man would stake his life on it a thousand times. This confidence in God's grace and knowledge of it makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and all His creatures.

"And this is the work of the Holy Spirit in faith. Hence a man is ready, without compulsion, to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, in love and praise to God, who has shown him this grace."

Our faith is lived out in works for our neighbor. This includes coming to worship for the sake of our neighbor. When we are present, we interact with all members by our worship, song and prayers... and visitors to St. Matthew find a faithful congregation that trusts in Jesus Christ as our Savior.

The "Epiphany of the Lord" means His appearance. Our appearance before the altar, receiving Holy Communion, sharing the peace of Christ with one another, singing "Holy, holy, holy" and "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" helps others see faith in something concrete ... a committed faith in the historic person of Jesus.

By your faithful worship, others learn how to worship. They learn there is a true God who is ready to receive sinners, forgive them, and create in them a new reason for living.

*Lord, help us to come and worship with gladness in our hearts,
and to receive from You grace each time we come. In Jesus' name, amen.*

❖ Forming a Short-term Communications Committee

From Pastor Otto

It's important for members of our congregation to be in the loop, and to have access to Christian spiritual care. I'm forming a task force to get feedback on what communication tools at St. Matthew are effective, and to hear if the timing, content, and overall use of media is reasonable for a church our size.

If you are willing to participate in a one-time meeting to share your thoughts, please reply to me so we can schedule a time that might work for a group. I'm considering a Tuesday or Thursday night, Saturday morning, or Sunday afternoon in February. Please email me at otto@gracefaithlove.org or call/text me on my church cell at 816-916-4935.

What will we discuss?

Over the years we have built regular communication venues most active members use to learn about upcoming events and opportunities to serve (church bulletin, annual directory, etc.).

Some communications occur through our Administrative Assistant in the church office, Tamy Dotson. Others are handled by members, such as website updates, monthly newsletter, and changing the outdoor church signs.

I'm wanting to hear if these tools are accomplishing their overall purpose, and if not, how we might change them for the better. A one-time meeting is a good start for the purpose of listening... then suggested changes may occur with the help of staff, lay leaders and volunteers.

We have a goal of reviewing our membership list to ensure accuracy of contact information in the coming months. We are completing a software change from our former database to a new, web-based database called Membership 360 from Concordia Publishing House. We will evaluate each household, person-by-person, to ensure we have their correct address and phone.

I hope all members will be helpful in this, providing information to Tamy in the church office, so that we pastors have the ability to contact and serve each person in the body of Christ.

Thank you for considering giving some feedback in this coming month of February.

Yours in Christ, Pastor Otto

Current Communications Tools at St. Matthew – Items to consider

- Sunday news bulletin – Content, format, CPH photo covers, information for visitors
- Monthly newsletter – Content, format, distribution (print, email, website)
- Website – Content, format for mobile devices, use of photos, standard forms
- Welcome screen in narthex – Content, photos, volunteer
- Brochures – Visitors; preschool enrollment; Lutheran education choices & scholarships
- Standard forms – Facility rental; scholarship applications; baptism & church membership info
- Church handbook – Distribution (print, email, website); reprinting sections in other media
- Social media – Facebook page (new posts, interactions)
- Membership contact info – Annual directory; photo directory; potential 360 website login
- Parish communication – Calling service; email lists; group texting; care ministry; elders
- Funeral notification – Calling service; church bulletin and announcements
- Bulletin boards – Regular usage; dedicated space to groups
- Outdoor signs – Content and approval of messages; frequency of change

St. Matthew

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This year Lent begins in the
month of March.

Ash Wednesday will be
March 6, with services at
4:00 and 7:30 p.m.

Our theme will be
"A Lent to Remember"

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FEBRUARY 2019 NEWSLETTER

❖ First Wednesday Dinner – *Come Join Us for Supper!*

We will be having a Valentine's-themed First Wednesday Dinner on February 6th at 6:00. We celebrate Christ's love for us, as well as our love for one another through Christ. **The menu** is salisbury steak or chicken strips, brown gravy, mashed potatoes, green beans, mixed green salad and valentine cupcakes. **Please add your name to the sign-up sheet in the Narthex.** All are invited, but we ask that you sign up so we can fix the correct amount of food. If are unable to attend after signing up, please let me know at pmarie6@att.net. *Thanks, Pam York*

❖ Upcoming Youth Events

Sunday, February 10th - Middle School Movie Night

Friday, February 15th - **High school youth will babysit children** so you can have a date night! It's a freewill offering to support their summer trip to the National Youth Gathering. Contact Pastor Andrews for info.

March - All Youth Fellowship Event; April - All Youth service project and Middle School Movie Night

❖ Auction, Dinner, and St. Paul's Choir Here at St. Matthew – *Support Heit's Point Camp*

You are invited to support the ministry of Heit's Point Lutheran Camp (near Lincoln, MO). We are holding a fundraiser right here at St. Matthew on Saturday, March 2 in our Fellowship Center. We start at 3:00 with a concert by the "Singing Saints" from St. Paul High School, followed at 4:30 with a Silent Auction and appetizers. Then at 5:00 we have dinner, a program, and Live Auction. Come for some or all of the event. **Please make reservations by Feb. 18.** Tickets are \$30 each, or reserve a table of 6 for \$150. All the funds are for a good cause—providing a great Christian camp experience for children in our area. You can make reservations using the form online at www.heitspoint.com and mail it to our own St. Matthew member, Joyce Martin, or put it in her church mailbox here.