

## Smokey Mountain Reflections the beginning

In 2002 after spending the summer in Fussen with our family we settled in to begin our time in Fort Wayne Indiana as I began learning how to be a pastor. One of the things I knew pastors needed to do was write monthly newsletter articles. I decided to start practicing this by producing monthly progress reports. The reports covered what was going on with the Portier household as we went through the seminary life, in order to keep informed all of those who were supporting and praying for us. Portier Progress reports known as PPR were produced from 2002 to 2006. When we arrived in Sevierville Tennessee they transitioned into the "Vicars Note" which was produced for one year until my ordination in August of 2007. Shortly after I was ordained the new Pastors Note became Smokey Mountain Reflections. I have sorted through these 200 plus articles and arranged them in a thematic way in order to make them easier to find on a devotional and or research basis. Enjoy!

Vicar's Note April 2007  
Greetings in Christ,

Is April already here? Is it possible that the call I felt in 1988, to become a pastor will actually be a reality in just four short months? From 1985 to 1988 God challenged me. He challenged me to think, speak, and act in ways that more accurately reflected a title I had worn my whole life, "**Christian**". As I passed through my mid twenties I was confronted with the fact that most of what I said and did looked and sounded just like everyone else around me, even those who said there was no such thing as God. Being a good sailor, I had learned that if you want to be good at anything you have to read and become very familiar with the instruction manual on that topic. So I took God's challenge and began to make prayer and scripture reading a regular part of my daily life. In about a three year time frame I read the Bible slowly and methodically cover to cover and in that same time frame there took place in me a shift. My world view changed. I no longer felt that as a male I had no say in the protection of unborn life, instead I felt a strong desire to preserve life from conception to grave. I no longer felt that I was the product of millions of years of genetic mutations, which even from a scientific perspective did not make much sense to me. I was now convinced that God created the world in six days about six thousand years ago. When I started to look at the world around me through that lens, when I saw the Flood and the tower of Babel as historic accounts not fairy tails, the miracle of plant, animal, and human life along with the suffering caused by sin in the world, now all made much more sense to me.

God then used most of the last 20 years to prepare me for ordination this coming August. (An interesting side note, it was 500 years ago this year that Martin Luther was ordained.) I look forward with great anticipation and excitement to what God has in store for us in the coming years.

In preparation for this coming season in our lives together I would like to issue you all a challenge, similar to the one God put on my heart some 20 years ago. I will lead into that challenge with the words of Saint Peter found in *1 Peter 3:15* where he says; ***But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*** This is the theme verse for our "Vision Session" and focus for our evangelism efforts in the months and years to come.

Let me try to answer for you the who, what, when, where, and how of our Vision Session this month;

Who: Every member of Saint Paul Lutheran Church that would like to be an active part of an exciting process to form a God pleasing, Christ centered focus on where we are as a congregation and where He would like us to go.

What is a "Vision Session"? A day of fun, food, and fellowship in which we will brainstorm and prayerfully consider all ideas pertaining to the topics listed below, so that they can be considered by our Elders, Church Council and eventually to the congregation for implementation.

When: 9AM to 3PM Saturday 28 April 2007

Where: Church Fellowship hall, breakfast and lunch provided

How: We will meet for the purpose of discussing the following things;

The Church name, The Church Mission Statement

The development of a Discipleship Committee which would be responsible for Evangelism, Stewardship, Fellowship

This unofficial group will come together for the purpose of refining and prayerfully considering the meaning and purpose of these things. We would also hope to develop a sense of ownership and purpose amongst the membership. Praying that this might motivate us to participate in God pleasing activities in support of our primary mission, which is Word and Sacrament ministry to the people of our community.

Please prayerfully consider this challenge and let's fill the sign in sheet in the Narthex and together fill the fellowship hall on Saturday April the 28<sup>th</sup>.

In Christ  
Robert Portier

***About 20 Or 30 people attended and we got a lot of good work done. That is what I remember now 12 years later.***