



From Pastor Jessica

“God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things that we cannot comprehend.

For to the snow he says, 'Fall on the earth'...” (Job 37: 5-6a)

Ever since I moved to North Dakota, there is a sound that I associate with Advent. No, it's not Christmas carols, or the busy shoppers, or the frenzy of commercials on radio and television. It's the sound of the crunch of the snow underfoot. It's not a sound I often heard in New York; that snow is too wet. But here, where it's cold and dry, it is one of the great sounds made in concert between humans and nature. There's nothing like it, the sound of the crunch of the snow underfoot. It's the herald of the coming seasons.

Advent often gets overshadowed by the secular commercialism of Christmas. Advent, which is a time of waiting and anticipation, is the exact opposite of the retail rush to get us to the holidays. How can you wait for Christmas when they have the decorations up just after Halloween?

When you're walking on snow that crunches underfoot; you don't dare rush. You very deliberately take each step, you need to be very intentional.

Then there's the crunch of snow under your tires. Now that's another sound that may or may not bring contemplative musings about the sounds of nature. But it also makes me think of Advent. What I experienced that last Monday as I drove in the snow from Grand Forks to Hannaford is that you can't rush in the snow. The snow makes you slow down, get focused and be alert. Now if that isn't Advent, I don't know what is!

You know how it is. You're on the right road, moving along slowly. You know what's coming: what landmark, what town, your final destination. And as you move along, you look to see where you are so that you know how far you've come and how long you have to go. Along the way you can get disoriented when a big truck passes and you become blind with the whiteout aftermath. You take deep breaths as you realize you've made it a little further, then a little further more upon your path. And you're always looking for that final resting place where you can just pull your car into the garage and sit back and thank God that you're home safe.

As a church, we're traveling towards Christmas, but it will be a while before we get there. In the meanwhile, we pay attention to where we are and where we need to be. We take it slow, and live in the anticipation of what is to come. We take our deep breaths as we move further and further on our journey. Sometimes we're blinded by the whirlwind around us, but we stay focused on the path so we don't lose our way. Eventually we will see the coming of our King and rest in the arms of our Savior, safe at home.

So, the next time you hear the crunch of the snow underfoot, think about Advent. Think about slowing down, getting focused, and welcoming the coming of the King.



Christmas Programs

Grace of Grace City — December 5 at 11:15, along with the Hanging of the Greens

Faith of Hannaford — December 12 during the 11:15 worship hour

First Presbyterian — December 12 during the 11:15 worship hour

Trinity of Binford — December 19 during the 8:30 worship hour

Our Savior's of McHenry — December 19 during the 9:45 worship hour

Lutheran Church of McVile — December 19 at 4:30 p.m. Potluck supper will follow the program.

Christmas Worship

*Christmas Eve — Friday, December 24
Services of Holy Communion*

2:30 — Worship service at Cooperstown Nursing Home (hosted by First Presbyterian of Cooperstown)

4:00 — Worship at McVile and at Grace City

5:30 — Worship at McHenry and at Binford

10:00 — Worship at Hannaford

The Christmas Eve schedule is entirely subject to change! If an interim pastor is not in place by then, times will be adjusted. Please watch your Sunday morning announcements, and check our website and Facebook for any changes.

December worship notes

“The Stars Tell the Story” during our Advent and Christmas services this year.

We'll begin the month of December with our traditional Hanging of the Greens service on the 5th. This will happen in all congregations except Our Savior's of Kloten.

The theme of the stars will continue on December 12th and 19th during our morning worship services. We will hear about the Fallen Star and/or the Promised Stars. (In some congregations, the morning worship will be replaced by the Christmas program.)



At our Christmas Eve services, we'll hear about The Guiding Star.

Lessons and Carols is planned for the congregations have worship services on Sunday, December 26.

And on the second Sunday of Christmas, January 2, the theme will be the Morning Star.

Special Congregational Meetings

Sunday, December 5

Following the worship services

Grace, Our Savior's/McHenry, Trinity, Faith, McVile, & Our Savior's/Kloten

Purpose of special meeting: to vote on issuing a new Letter of Call to Pastor Jessica Merchant. New Letter of Call would be effective January 1, 2011.

Issuance of new call is required by the ELCA Constitution because of change in configuration of Tri-County Ministry. (This vote is not necessary at First Presbyterian.)

Annual mission project coming up



On Saturday, December 11, the Tri-County Ministry confirmation class will take their annual trip to Grand Forks to spend a day working at the Northlands Rescue Mission.

The students have placed boxes in our churches for your donations to the mission. Monetary donations will also be accepted; those gifts may be given to Pastor Jessica or mailed to the TCM office in Binford. These donations will either be used by the confirmation students to purchase more items for the mission, or will be given directly to the mission.

The urgent needs of the rescue mission are as follows:

Bike locks	Bikes
Spices	Men's toiletries
Shavers	Duffle bags
Plastic totes	Wallets
Phone cards	Work gloves
K-Mart gift cards	Men's clothing

(Residents of the mission will repair bikes that are donated, either for their own or for other use.)

All junior and senior high youth, as well as adults, are invited along on this trip.

Transportation time and places:
From Hannaford at 8:00 a.m.
From Binford at 8:30 a.m.
From McVile at 9:00 a.m.

In order for adequate transportation to be arranged, and also so we can let Northlands know how many workers to plan for, you are asked to contact the Binford office or Darla Fliflet if you plan to go. We need to hear from you by December 6.

Just exactly what is God up to?

At our last Tri-County Council meeting (11.8) Bishop Rindy gave us an overview of the various parishes in our geographical area which are currently (or soon to be) looking to call pastors. (Also present at our meeting was Ms. Barb Ault representing the Presbytery of the Northern Plains.) In our own conference there are two parishes, and in our neighboring conference to the east, the Mayville conference has numerous parishes that are seeking to call clergy. In the mix of churches seeking pastors are the ELCA, PC(USA), United Church of Christ, and the Methodist Church. Our parish is not the only ecumenical parish that is seeking to call a pastor; to our east there are Methodist and UCC ecumenical parishes as well.

In light of this unique and pressing situation, the leaders of the ELCA, PC(USA), and Methodist churches have sought to have a time when leaders from all these congregations may have an opportunity to sit and speak with one another about what God is doing in their churches and to what might God be calling us. Therefore, on **December 8th** leaders from our Tri-County Ministry churches will be gathering in Finley for conversation with other brothers and sisters in Christ.

What is to come from these conversations, you might ask? Honestly, we don't know. It may be a chance for members of our churches to gather, get to know one another, share our stories, and leave with a better understanding of who our neighbors are. It could also be a chance for churches to come to a realization that there could be developing relationships between churches in different parishes; this opportunity is a proving ground for such seeds to be planted and come to fruition.

This meeting is for conversation only. The governing bodies of our synod and presbytery are not dictating any action, and no decisions will be made. This gives us the opportunity to see what God is doing in the churches and what and where God may be calling us. We will be able to share our stories and travel on a journey with other kindred who are walking similar paths as ours. Please keep our council, our leaders, and God's church, the Body of Christ, in your prayers.

Finley Lutheran Church
Wednesday evening, December 8
7:30

To Our Dear, Dear Friends at Tri-County Ministry,

Merci, Danka, Gracias, Megwich, THANK YOU!!! Thank you for so many things.

Our final day with you, worshiping, eating, laughing, crying, is something we will never forget. Thank you for your kind words, your hugs, your cards and gifts, your faith, your hard work behind the scenes. Thank you for being who you are: you have been such great blessings in our lives.

These past years—just shy of 3 years—with you have been about as close to ideal as we could ever hope to experience. Working alongside the group of faithful, spirited (and fun!) folk that you are; working alongside the immensely gifted and dedicated (and fun!) staff of Jessica and Theresa; working and living in this beautiful countryside; working alongside each other. We are so grateful for our time with Tri-County Ministry. We hope that our time together has blessed you as much as it has blessed us; and as we part ways, we rest in the knowledge that God will continue to bless you and give you what you need.

With love,
Cheri and Marli

P.S. Here's our new address: P.O. Box 602
Wadena, MN 56482

The coffee's always on!

Tri-County Ministry Council highlights — November 8

Mabel of Sutton will be holding their second vote on December 5, voting on whether or not to separate from the ELCA.

Cooperstown Trinity is awaiting a decision from their insurance company regarding the claim for water damage in the parsonage basement. They requested that TCM pay their \$1000 deductible. Tabled until insurance settlement is completed.

Bishop Bill Rindy met with the council and submitted the name of a prospective interim pastor. The Council authorized the Executive Committee to interview the prospective interim and to issue a contract if they see fit. The Bishop also explained the interim process as it relates to Pastor Jessica.

The next meeting of the TCM Council will be December 15.

Because of the period of transition in Tri-County Ministry, this newsletter is covering only the month of December. A separate January newsletter will be mailed out toward the end of December, when more definite plans are in place for the new year.

Since the January newsletter will be printed right before Christmas, please get all dates and other information to Theresa as soon as possible.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN tally

The Tri-County Ministry Capital Campaign officially ended on November 15. Gifts received total \$17,134.

Support for the future of our parish came from members of all congregations, in gifts of all sizes.

Thanks be to God!

Anyone still wishing to make a donation may mail a check to the TCM office in Binford.

A Word of Thanks...

This is the season in which gratitude is most often expressed: for harvest, for a beautiful fall, for life. I want to add my thanks to you for your support during what is for many of you challenging times. The good work we've done together for many years continues through your support, in both prayer and finances. Thanks.

Death of Civility

The Today Show recently ran a series of stories on the death of civility. It lifted up email, blogs, and the lack of accountability for what one says as commonplace in our society... and for the worse. In theological terms, **it could be framed as the death of the eighth commandment**. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. Martin Luther encouraged us to speak well of our neighbor and explain their actions in the kindest possible way, rather than cutting, ripping, and tearing our neighbors to pieces.

Over six years ago, a congregation seeking moral guidance asked a synod assembly if our church, the ELCA, could create a document to help us think through the moral implications of our new abilities in the area of genetics: human, animal, and plant. We have powers never available to previous generations. We all know that with power come both opportunity and responsibility. A churchwide assembly agreed that such guidance could be helpful to the church, especially to those who live and work in areas surrounded by genetics.

The third draft of this proposed statement has been discussed at two different hearings in our synod; one at Gackle, the other at Adams. The feedback from these two forums has been received by the taskforce charged with creating the statement. As a result of these hearings, the taskforce spent nearly a full day processing feedback from farmers in Eastern North Dakota.

A lot of things are being said about the draft, many of them by people who have never read the document. Many conversations I have had are with people who have only read two editorials in a regional farming publication; these editorials have not been faithful to the proposed statement. I have and will continue to encourage people to read the entire draft before forming an opinion about it. One of our area farmers, upon seeing an editorial about the document was very angry, but after reading the actual document told me that he had changed his opinion and felt that the draft was actually pretty good.

As Lutheran Christians, we have always held that our vocations, our callings from God to serve and love one another in God's world, are important. Some are saying that the church should have nothing to do with how our farmers live out their vocations. The first commandment in the Bible is to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it. Those who have been called to care for the land know the value of being faithful stewards, not only for the present, but for future generations as well. ***Our faith has to extend and permeate our lives beyond one hour a week on Sunday. That being said, the church is not going to tell farmers what they can or can't plant. The church isn't going to tell doctors what they can or can't do.*** Yet in this new era of amazing power in the area of genetics, it is helpful for people of faith to be in conversation with each other to help us steward and create the best possible future for all of God's creation.

My request: Please take time to read a document before you criticize it. Please do not jump to assuming the worst in others. Let it not be said that we added to the death of civility. Let the Church of Jesus Christ model the love, care, and concern for each other that Jesus did. In so doing, our lights will shine in this darkness.

The proposed draft statement can be read at: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements-in-Process/Genetics.aspx>

Thank you,



Bishop Bill Rindy

Eastern North Dakota Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Lutheran / Presbyterian Q & A

Looking ahead to 2011

A wonderful part of Tri-County Ministry is that we are an ecumenical parish. Our fellowship of Presbyterians and Lutherans is a witness that the Body of Christ is greater than our individual denominations. In the effort for us to know who we are better and to get to know each other better there will be a series of questions and answers regarding our two denominations. These questions and answers come from Martin Marty's *Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers: Exploring Christian Faith* and Donald McKim's *Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers: Exploring Christian Faith*. The answers given are a distillation of the full answers found in the books.

What makes Lutherans and Presbyterians different from each other?

One of the differences is the type of church government (polity). Lutherans Have a hierarchical form of polity with bishops exercising authority in some church issues; whereas Presbyterian polity features elected members of presbyteries as the focus of authority and decision making.

As seen in an earlier Question and Answer on the churches' confessions, there are similar creeds that both confess and some which are particular to its denomination. Theologically, Presbyterians and Lutherans differ in views about the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, what goes on in baptism, and the relationship of Law/law and Gospel. Martin Marty writes, "The differences are or seem great enough to keep the churches from merging into one and losing positive accents, and small enough to promote common Christian witness and celebration." (pg 19)

Although there are differences among the two denominations, our churches have been in full communion with one another since 1997. Full communion is when two churches develop a relationship based on a common confessing of the Christian faith and a mutual recognition of baptism and sharing of the Lord's Supper. This does not mean that two churches merge; rather, in reaching agreements, churches also respect differences. These denominations likewise jointly worship, may exchange clergy, and also share a commitment to evangelism, witness and service in the world.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is in *full communion* with the following church bodies: PC(USA) (1997), the United Church of Christ (1997), the Reformed Church in America (1997), the Episcopal Church (1999), the Moravian Church (1999) and the Methodist Church (2009).

The PC(USA) is in *full communion* with the following church bodies: ELCA (1997), the United Church of Christ (1997), and the Reformed Church in America(1997).

(compiled by Pastor Jessica)

Plans are being made for a town hall forum sometime in January or February. Preliminary plans are for this forum to be held at Trinity in Binford. The discussion will center on the social statement being developed by the ELCA which deals with genetics. The forum will be led by people who have been involved with the study, and will be open to the public. Pastor Jessica is working with the synod office in organizing this gathering.

Annual meeting dates have been submitted to the TCM office. Those dates will be finalized once we have an interim plan in place. It may be necessary to ask councils/session for some flexibility with the scheduling so that a pastor may be present at each annual meeting.

If you've been wondering about Seminary on the Prairie — yes, it will continue. This annual event will happen June 3-4 at Red Willow Bible Camp.

Youth should watch for a newsletter in December or January with details about our annual ski trips.

And finally, a request from the TCM office: please continue to communicate as much as or more than before. Hospitalizations or other prayer needs, visitation needs, dates for the calendar, or whatever — any and all information is greatly appreciated!

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Christmas Cantata

“Sing and Shout for Joy”

By Tom Fettke

Sunday, December 12

7:30 p.m.

Lutheran Church of McVille

Directed by Linda Loe

Accompanied by Verna Lindvall

Based on Psalm 98 —

“Sing and shout for joy to the Lord,
all the earth.”

Favorite Christmas carols and praise
choruses.