

Connections

Immanuel Lutheran Church in Houston Heights

Vol. 5, No. 3

February 2016

Hot and Cold

There is an old story about a country pastor you may have heard:

A member of a certain church, who previously had been attending services regularly, stopped going. After a few weeks, the pastor decided to visit him. It was a chilly evening. The pastor found the man at home alone, sitting before a blazing fire.



Guessing the reason for his pastor's visit, the man welcomed him, led him to a big chair near the fireplace and waited. The pastor made himself comfortable but said nothing. In the grave silence, he contemplated the play of the flames around the burning logs.

After some minutes, the pastor took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and placed it to one side of the hearth all alone. Then he sat back in his chair, still silent. The host watched all this in quiet fascination.

As the one lone ember's flame diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and "dead as a doornail."

Not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting.

Just before the pastor was ready to leave, he picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow once more with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it.

As the pastor reached the door to leave, his host said, "Thank you so much for your visit and especially for the fiery sermon. I shall be back in church next Sunday."



(continued on page 3)



Looking Back

As the Old Year (2015) passed, memories came of the past and the blessings. My former congregation, St. John Lutheran on the eastside, was decommissioned in May 2004. Then, the following month, Immanuel offered me the call as Associate Pastor with main duty being to visit the homebound. I had a limited duty, preach once each month and report to the Elders on my visits.

The big surprise came when the former senior pastor accepted a call. Then followed the closing of our parochial school, which was clearly a necessity, even with all the refurbishing of the school area and the publicity that was put out. Then another surprise, our principal left, which members could not understand. I was left to carry the church and pastoral duties. I thank the Lord for all the help from the Elders and individual members. Retired ministers were contacted to hold services on the Sundays I was not preaching. I kept busy with hospital calls, baptisms, weddings, meetings and also finished up the last school confirmation class. We contacted District and they asked for a study of our congregation, followed with interim pastors and now a senior pastor.

But, there are many faithful members that are unsung. I think of the lady who sits before a computer with a stack of cards. She records the people present on Sunday, plus pulls out the visitors. How long has she been doing this?

Our church and ECE secretaries, have their regular duties, but are always willing to go the extra mile to be of service to you. The church secretary fills vases with flowers left over from the Sunday services for me to take and surprise our homebound members. The ECE secretary is often there when I call late in the afternoon, and she answers my questions about finding members' homes or what hospital calls I need to make. There are times when she will ask me to visit ECE parents in the hospitals.

We have greeters present nearly every Sunday morning who welcome you and ask visitors for their names and addresses to record on our visitation book.

Have you ever noticed the flags on our parking lot? Who puts them up every Sunday? Oh, it may be a trustee, for which we ought to be thankful.

Then the Altar Guild, what a job they do, and they are organized so well.

The members who have the big jobs of hanging the banners and placing the black or white drapes on the cross for the Lent and Easter seasons.

Let me never forget the ones in the balcony who run the PowerPoint and audio system.

I mention all these things because I was raised in a mission congregation where almost all of these duties were done by the Pastor. If there are others who I have missed, please forgive me. Thank you, those who show your love for Immanuel by your deeds, may the Lord bless you!

~Rev. Claudio Perez

Hot and Cold . . .

(continued from page 1)

Some of you reading this are not able to come to church as regularly as you once did due to age or other health reasons. For those, Pastor Perez and I are always happy to bring God's Word to you. But for those of you who have stopped meeting with the fellowship of the Saints for some other reason, I'd ask that you take a moment to pause and reconsider.

I understand there are many reasons for regular church attendance to lag. But I would argue that most of these "reasons" are simply excuses that end up hurting you in the end. Some may pull away because they may see the church as full of hypocrites. Well, yes, the church does have hypocrites. It is a place for ALL sinners to receive forgiveness and renewal.

Some may fall away because they may not find worship innovative and stimulating enough. Yes, worship is not intended or designed to be "entertainment." It is designed to deliver God's Word and His gift of forgiveness and renewal. Hollywood does a great job of entertaining those who have no vested interest. But for the concerned, interest is determined by the subject rather than the venue or style.

Some may have let personal differences or conflicts drive them away. The sick do not get better by staying away from the doctor; God promises healing through His forgiveness, not through time and separation. Some may fall away because of the pull of other activities, and they may have convinced themselves that

they can commune with God just as well in front of the television, in the sports stadium, or in a deer stand. Absolutely not. Yes, God is present in all those places, but He promises to give His blessings through His Word and Sacraments. Do you hear the Bible read in the boat at the lake? He promises to be active in our lives when we gather together around His Name and we listen.

The list of excuses is virtually inexhaustible. Satan can always find more distractions to tempt us. Have you let your soul slide out of the direct contact of the Holy Spirit's fire of His Saints gathered in worship? I pray you look at this area of your lives with fresh eyes. If you'd like to talk, just let me know. I look forward to seeing you Sunday.

*~Your Brother in Christ,
Pastor King*

Sunday Morning Coffee and Donuts

Thank you to all the volunteers that make coffee or pick up donuts on Sunday mornings.

Volunteers are always needed to keep these refreshments going. The schedule is posted in Miertschin Hall. Please consider taking a turn and signing up.

~Cathleen Chevallier

Thank you!



2015 HAWC Christmas Project

Final Numbers

\$ 7685.28

and more

boxes of toys

Thank you again for
opening your hearts

to help



Focus on Stewardship

We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves us is never alone. That is because faith is a living, busy, and active thing. It inhales all of God's riches in Christ and exhales this in love and service to the neighbor.

But who is my neighbor? God in His mercy has placed us into three distinct communities: society, family, and the church. That means we have a duty to those around us in each of these communities. We pray for the people in these three communities daily. We rejoice with them in times of joy and suffer with them in times of sadness. And we give to them from the income that God provides as we are able and as they have need.

So we pay taxes to our governments so that they may do the work that is needed for our neighbors in society. We give to our families so that they have food and clothing, house and home, even educations. And we give to our church—our local congregations—so that the gospel may be preached and the sacraments administered for us and others.

The beauty of this is that God smiles upon all that giving. When you pay your taxes, God is pleased that you have served your neighbor who needs what the government provides. When you provide for your family, God is pleased. That you have helped your neighbor with the necessities of life by sharing with them what He has given to you, God is pleased. And when you give to your local congregation to support the ongoing preaching of the gospel, God is pleased. To all this giving, He says to you, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

(continued on page 7)

Fritsche Update



*(Excerpts from the
January 2016
newsletter)*

Happy New Year from the Fritsche family! It was a beautiful end to 2015 and a joyful beginning to 2016!

Long before our family's arrival in Santo Domingo, our missionaries from Santiago were commuting here to preach and teach the Gospel. A number of new Christians were catechized, baptized and confirmed, but because of lack of more missionary personnel, they weren't able to be served on a regular basis. One of the goals in bringing our family to the capital was to eventually rally these people and begin a second mission with regular worship, study and fellowship. On December 12th we officially began services in the neighborhood of Ozama. For now, we have worship twice a month and a catechism class with hopefully more to come!

Throughout the month of December in the midst of our regular visits in Las Americas, we identified numerous people who desired Holy Baptism either for themselves or their children. Pastor Willy did several sessions of teaching on Holy Baptism on Saturday afternoons. By the grace of God, on Sunday, December 20th we celebrated eight baptisms. Now the follow-up begins as we continue to teach and encourage these new Christians in their faith and life. Please keep them and us in your prayers.

It was very wonderful to have some family time as the boys were off of school and Joel's parents joined us for the holidays. We were incredibly blessed to be able to travel to Punta Cana and the Samana province.



Rest and relaxation was provided for the whole family and "Happy New Year" rang out as we watched fireworks from our roof. Now, it is time to get back in the swing of things. The boys are more than ready to get back to school and friends. Joel is preparing for a week-long trip for a symposium in Fort Wayne. A great beginning to the year! How blessed we have been! As 2016 begins, we pray for you all, that you have the peace and contentment of the Lord in your lives. You all are certainly a blessing to us and we pray that you are likewise blessed. Prospera Ario Nuevo!

Newsletter Staff

Editor.....	Barbara Szalkowski
Contributors.....	Kathy Angst
.....	Cathleen Chevallier
.....	Diane Robinson
.....	Karen Evans
.....	Pastor Jeffrey King
.....	Pastor Perez
Graphic Design.....	Matthew Szalkowski

Travel Beyond This Point Not Recommended

(Rev. Keith Aschenbeck's column, Alaska Mission for Christ newsletter, January 2016)

In John 16:33, Jesus says, "In this world you will have trouble."

Living in Tok, AK has brought a whole new world of difficulties to our family. The beauty of this area is absolutely stunning. That is a major reason many people move to this area. The extreme difficulty of surviving in this environment often sends many back home within a year or two. While these hardships are new to our family, for many of the people living here the hardships of surviving just south of the Arctic Circle have lasted a lifetime.

The strength and resilience of the Indians who have lived in this area for centuries is impressive. Their quiet acceptance of such a harsh fight for survival is simply part of who they are and many feel blessed to have been born into such a life.



Every so often I drive past the sign in the picture. As I do, I run through a mental checklist of everything I have in the vehicle with me. I also wonder how much Christians in the United States are truly prepared to travel

the road of life with Christ? Have we rightly prepared for what lies ahead? Or do we have some idealistic view of what we think life in Christ should be? Or that somehow we can avoid the troubles that come with living in a sinful world?

Alongside the signs that say "Know Christ, Know Peace!" should we maybe post warning signs such as "Know Christ, Know Trouble?" There are a whole host of signs we could come up with, "The easy road is the wrong road!," "Smooth Sailing = Deadly Seas."

Over and over again the Scriptures are clear... following Christ leads to a difficult life in this world. Just check out the end of the Beatitudes in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The Revelation was given to John to encourage the churches through the suffering that was upon them. How greatly the comfort of the Gospel must have spoken to the early Christians who saw so much persecution (whose lives were in constant danger), all because they followed Christ!

People who are in the midst of great suffering are often well prepared to hear the true sweetness of the Gospel. The suffering may be self-imposed such as the woman at the well (*John 4*), physical (any of Jesus' healings) or spiritual like the demon-possessed man (*Mark 5*). And while some may be tempted to think all went well in life for those Jesus healed, don't forget: these people too would be hated and persecuted by Jews and Romans alike. Many would flee their homes, others would be tortured and killed. Life for early Christians after Jesus ascended was anything but peace and happiness. But they did not lose faith. Jesus had prepared them for such a life.

(continued on page 7)

Reflection & Repentance: Hymns of Lent

We will be examining Lenten Hymns and applying their messages in our lives.

Ash Wednesday **February 10, 7:00 pm**
w/Imposition of Ashes and Communion
Pre-service Dinner 5:30 pm

Wednesday Midweek Lent Services
February 17-March 16, 7:00 pm

Palm Sunday **March 20, 9:00 am**
w/ Communion

Maundy Thursday **March 24, 7:00 pm**
w/ Communion

Good Friday **March 25, 7:00 pm**

Easter Egg Hunt **March 26, 10:00 am**
(Saturday)

Easter Sunday **March 27**
7:00 am Worship w/ Communion
~8:30 am Easter Breakfast
10:00 am Worship, non-Communion



Rev. Aschenbeck . . .

(continued from page 6)

Nothing about the Christian life is "easy." It might be something small, like being late to an appointment to help someone in need, or something bigger like not taking that dream vacation because a family member's health has deteriorated. The struggle may be to serve

someone who only seems to take from you or forgive an enemy who still intends to hurt you. It could also involve going on that mission trip that doesn't really fit into your life's schedule. Nothing about loving others more than yourself is easy! If it was it wouldn't have taken God sending His perfect Son to love you more than He loved Himself. He gave himself up for you even while you were still His enemy! (*Romans 5:10*). We will suffer only for a time, but Jesus suffered an eternity of hell to pay the debt we owe. In doing so He declares to us, "Take heart! I have overcome the world." (*John 16:33*). This world is a valley of the shadow of death, but through Christ his goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever!" (*Psalms 23*).

Stewardship . . .

(continued from page 4)

Looking at giving in this light makes it a joy to give. The joy is multiplied. There is joy in you because you have served your neighbor in his need. There is joy in your neighbor for God has answered their prayers through you. And God rejoices and is pleased with it all. It might just make the humdrum of grocery shopping and mortgage payments a bit more joyous. It might even make April 15 tolerable (St. Paul had to have this pep talk with the Romans, also, "This is why you pay taxes...." *Romans 13:6*). And it surely will make the envelope placed into the offering plate a joyful thing.

(Stewardship newsletter insert for January 2016, provided on the LCMS website <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=3900>)

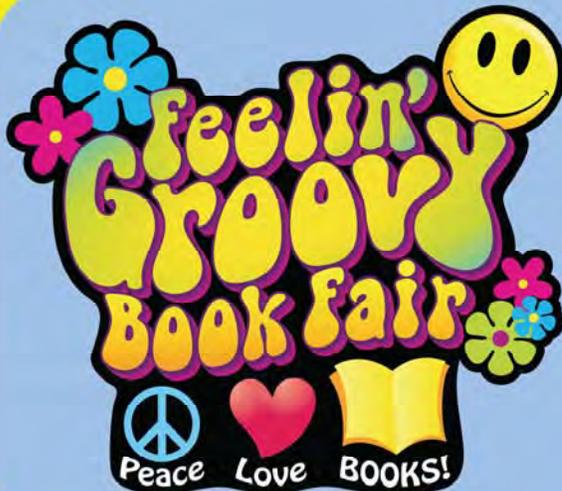
~submitted by Kathy Angst

SAVE THE DATE!

Saturday, March 26th

EASTER EGG

HUNT



Mark your Calendar!

Join us for Lunch and Book
Shopping on Social Sunday

March 6th, 2016

11:30 am thru 1:00 pm

Immanuel Lutheran Church - February 2016 (Revised)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 Bible Study @ 6:30 – 8:00 pm	2 All Boards @ 7:00 pm	3 Women's Bible Study @ 10:30 am Unveil Fellowship @ 6:00 – 9:00 pm	4 Bingo @ 1:00–3:00 pm Bells @ 6:30 pm Choir @ 7:30 pm	5	6 Unveil Setup @ 11:00 – 1:00 pm
7 Usher Team #2 Worship @ 9:00 am w/Communion Adult Bible Class and Sunday School Unveil Church @ 10:15 am	8	9 Men's Breakfast @ AAA restaurant @ 6:30 am Naomi Meeting @ 7:00 pm	10 Ash Wednesday Usher Team #3 Dinner @ 5:30 pm Worship 7:00 pm w/Communion	11 Bells @ 6:30 pm Choir @ 7:30 pm	12	13 Unveil Setup @ 11:00 – 1:00 pm Parents' Time Off 4:00 – 8:00 pm
14 Valentines' Day Usher Team #4 Worship @ 9:00 am Adult Bible Class and Sunday School Unveil Church @ 10:15 am	15 Presidents' Day Offices Closed Bible Study @ 6:30 – 8:00 pm	16	17 Women's Bible Study @ 10:30 am Usher Team #5 Midweek Lent Worship 7:00 pm	18 Hamburger Fry @ 11:00 – 1:00 pm Bells @ 6:30 pm Choir @ 7:30 pm	19	20 Unveil Setup @ 11:00 – 1:00 pm
21 Usher Team #1 Worship @ 9:00 am w/Communion Adult Bible Class and Sunday School Unveil Church @ 10:15 am	22	23 Men's Breakfast @ AAA restaurant @ 6:30 am	24 Usher Team #2 Midweek Lent Worship 7:00 pm	25 Bells @ 6:30 pm Choir @ 7:30 pm	26	27 Unveil Setup @ 11:00 – 1:00 pm
28 Usher Team #3 Worship @ 9:00 am Adult Bible Class and Sunday School Unveil Church @ 10:15 am	29	 <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle; margin-left: 20px;"> <p>The St. Olaf Choir, under the direction of Anton Armstrong, will appear in concert at Grace Presbyterian Church, 10221 Ella Lee Lane, on Tuesday, February 9, at 7:00 pm Tickets \$30 Adults, \$10 Students, 15% off for groups of 10+ stolaf.edu/tickets • 800-363-5487</p> </div>				

Parents' Time Off

Need a little time alone! Let us watch your child(ren) while you enjoy a quiet dinner with your sweetheart. Open to the Community! Church Sponsored!

Saturday, Feb 13th, 2016 4-8pm

Immanuel - Miertschin Hall
\$20.00 (siblings \$10.00 ea.)
Ages 2 to 9 years old

Dinner(Chicken Nuggets/Fries), **Crafts**, **Games**, and **Movie**

Bring a sippy cup, blanket and/or pillow.
If your child is in diapers or being potty trained, please send diapers and a change of clothes.



For information and/or reservations, call the Church Office @ 713-864-2651

Please Register by Friday, Feb 5th @ 4pm!

-----Cut Here and RETURN THIS FORM WITH PAYMENT-----

PTO Registration Form (One Form per Child)

Child's Name: _____ Age: _____

Name of Parent/Guardian: _____

Name of person picking up or dropping off, if not Parent/Guardian: _____

Emergency Contact Number (s): _____

Drop Off Time: _____ pm Pick Up Time: _____ pm

Is there anything we should know about your child or their needs? _____

(If your child has special dietary needs, please be sure and bring their food/snacks with them)



Immanuel Lutheran Church
306 E 15th St
Houston, TX 77008

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 2489
NORTH HOUSTON,
TEXAS

Return Service Requested

To the Family of:

Loving God ~ Loving Neighbors ~ Serving Others



Ash Wednesday
February 10
Worship Service
w/Imposition
of Ashes
and Communion
7:00 pm

Pre-service Dinner
@ 5:30 pm