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THE

# CROSSWORD

February 2023

A PUBLICATION OF HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Vol. LXVI, No. 3

## A(NOTHER) NEW YEAR OF MINISTRY

*from Pastor Nathan Erb*

Here we go again. A new year—another year of ministry. But this year, things will be different. This past weekend, the members of Holy Cross voted in a new structure for how we will govern ourselves as well as how we will do ministry going forward. So we begin a new ministry year—a new era. I'm excited to see how God will work through us and what amazing things He'll do in our midst.

### THE BODY HAS MANY MEMBERS

One of the significant changes being made is that the Board of Directors will no longer consist of Commission directors, who are charged with overseeing specific areas of ministry. Instead, those who serve as directors on the Board will take a few steps back, allowing them to view Holy Cross as a whole and work to set goals based on a renewed vision to be the Church. This will allow us to look beyond what's just in front of us and onward toward the horizon. We'll ask important questions such as, "What has God called us to do in our community?" "How can Holy Cross be effective in sharing the Gospel with our friends

and neighbors?" "What role might the preschool play in building up a base of young families that will be vital for our future?" "What unique gifts and callings has God given our members that can be used to achieve our goals?"

That last question is the key to our success! The church is one body in Christ but made of many members, each vital to making the body work. As we learn from scripture—"the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"—each member, no matter its size or position, works together to make the whole body work optimally.

It's critical to understand that, while Holy Cross IS your church, it's not YOUR church. The church and her mission belong to God. We have been invited by God to join Him in reaching out to those who are hurting, confused, questioning, and searching. Christ is the Good Shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep, already secure in the pen, to find the one who is lost. And, as a good shepherd does, He brings the lost back to the sheep pen (the church) to join the 99 and continues to care for us all.

### INVEST IN THE KINGDOM

Over the past number of years, Holy Cross has done a phenomenal job of caring for each other. Despite several hurdles, including a prolonged vacancy and a global pandemic, you have held on tightly to each other and to God and have come out the other side! And while it will be important to maintain the family dynamic that has been (and remains) so important, it is time to begin shifting our gaze outward.

Jesus called His disciples, saying, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Later, He likened their mission to going out to the fields that are ripe for harvest and bringing in the fruit. So it's important for us to be thinking about how we can plant the seed of God's Word in as many hearts as we can. The amazing part of joining Jesus on His mission is that He's already been at work in our community—in the lives of family, friends, neighbors, and even people we don't know. Perhaps the seed of faith was planted by someone else, and we get to water it. Or, someone else has

*(Continued on page 5)*

# PRESIDENT'S JOURNAL

from Kerry Geffert

Chances are you are currently, or have been in the past, a member of Holy Cross. My work on our Constitution and Bylaws has caused me to reflect on what it means to be a Holy Cross member. We have four different categories of members; I'll let you check the Bylaws to see what they are. Those are the official categories, but there are also some unofficial ones.

One might hear the term "active" member, which implies there must be "inactive" members. What defines an active member? Is it someone who worships regularly in person (unless unable to do so)? Who communes regularly? Is it someone who demonstrates regular financial stewardship? Or someone who regularly attends church activities? And how often is "regular" in these instances?

My Grandfather, an LCMS minister, is reputed to have wished some worshippers "Happy 4th of July" at the end of an Easter service since he knew he wouldn't see them until Christmas. I grew up calling those members "C & E's" – "Christmas & Easter." I've also heard the term "Chreasters." Then there are the "marry and bury" members - those who believe membership entitles them and their family members to use the church for weddings and funerals. Your family may have spoken of other groupings.




So, in which member category(ies) – whether official or unofficial – do you belong? Is this the category to which you strive to belong? More to the point, in which category does Christ want you to belong?

In 2023 we plan to make a concerted effort to grow by reaching out to our community (which will be defined differently depending on the situation). We want to show Holy Cross as a vibrant and welcoming member of the community in hopes that people will say, "Hey, I want to be part of that congregation!"

This effort may require that we step outside our comfort zones. It will require creativity, "outside-the-box" thinking, trust, faith, flexibility and prayer. And you. Yes, you! External growth tends to go hand in hand with internal growth. To show others that we are a vibrant community that they will want to join, they must first see that vibrant community. And that means you, a member of Holy Cross.

If you don't currently identify as an "active" member, what can we do to help make that happen? Please email me— [president@holycrosstrumbull.com](mailto:president@holycrosstrumbull.com) —and share your thoughts.

In the meantime, let's all ponder the question "In which category does Christ want me to belong?" 



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# When Colleagues Think Your Faith Is a Joke

Photo by Sigmund on Unsplash

MY COWORKERS THINK MY FAITH IS A JOKE. THEY'RE NEVER MEAN ABOUT IT. THEY JUST DON'T REALIZE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF IT. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

**Y**our question speaks to the heart of many conversations I've had with believers in secular spaces. We're all acutely aware our non-Christian coworkers often don't "get" our beliefs. And that's not the end of it. Our brains can take one idea and pile on a whole host of other assumptions:

***The rest of the team must think I'm so dumb for believing what I do.***

***We have nothing in common. He probably dreads working with me.***

***I bet she thinks I'm a goody-goody, sitting on my high horse, thumping my Bible.***

***He knows his lifestyle isn't supported by my faith. He probably thinks I hate him.***

The mental leaps can continue far beyond these examples, depending on your situation. When clients or friends tell me their coworkers think their faith is a joke, I usually respond, "Oh, do they? How do you know that?"

I know. That's a truly annoying response to give someone who's reaching out for commiseration. I assure you my response is given with lots of love and the best of intentions. Because it's important for us to sort out the facts and ensure we aren't making assumptions about how others may feel about us or our faith.

It's important for us to sort out the facts and ensure we aren't making assumptions about how others may feel about us or our faith.

Skeptical coworkers may simply have little exposure to authentic Christianity, causing them to respond how

most of us might respond to the unfamiliar. Or they may have had negative experiences with Christians in the past, and they're wondering if you're any different. Or maybe they *do* think your faith is a joke. In any case, don't give the Enemy a foothold or cause hesitation that could squash the kingdom opportunity within the situation.

We can't forget the spiritual warfare happening around us—even at work. The Enemy can use a snide comment or an eye roll from a coworker to shut down a relationship or a conversation that could lead to something wonderful. When our fear of man (Prov. 29:25) causes us to retreat, we can't build relationships that represent Christ more fully and accurately within our workplaces.

## 2 REMINDERS

We must remember two things. First, it shouldn't surprise us when the world hates Jesus and his followers (John 15:18). Faith in Jesus requires a certain amount of grit, and a lot of prayers, as we walk into the resistance we should very much expect from our secular workplaces.

Second, God can use you there. A Christian called to be a church pastor and a Christian called to the marketplace have *both* been called to spread the good news. And which has more exposure to the unreached? I'm not minimizing the role pastors have in spreading the gospel, but we often miss the unique opportunity we have in the secular workplace.

*(Continued on page 6)*

# NOTEWORTHY

News, Notes, & Acknowledgements from the Holy Cross Community

## FROM THE EVANGELISM DIRECTOR

As Evangelism Commission Director over the last couple years, in which I finished the term of an open position, I have tried to convey each month in the newsletter ways in which we can bring out the evangelism skills we all possess. It's a difficult skill, certainly, but as the hymn goes, even if we cannot preach like Paul, we can still show the love of God.

This will be my final monthly encouragement to you as Evangelism Director. The position was up for election in January's Annual Meeting and I declined to "re-up" and I actually think it will be helpful to explain why. A huge element of the Evangelism position was and is publicity. Originally it was the placement of newspaper and/or radio advertising and promotion, along with working with the local newspapers to publicize events or write feature stories. Neither one of those forums is remotely viable these days.

The way to publicize now is through the many social media outlets available to us, such as those ranked the top 10 social media platforms in 2022: Facebook, YouTube, What'sApp, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Pinterest,

Reddit, LinkedIn, Twitter. Holy Cross has a presence on a few of those, including Facebook, but to be a part of any of those with effectiveness requires someone with social media skill, and that isn't me.

So I will leave the position, hopeful that someone with social media skills will use them to the glory of God and to the benefit of Holy Cross. But at the least, if you have an e-mail account, you can be a part of the evangelism effort at Holy Cross with e-mail invites to friends and family you know who are looking for a church home. Tell them what HC offers in the way of Bible class and worship, and help accommodate them with transport here if needed. We have a lot to offer so there is no shortage of reasons for people to come here.

Finally, a thank you to Doris Bernt, D.J. Broadbin, Tina Curto, and Elisabeth Erb for their willingness to serve with me as commission members. Their counsel was very valuable.

*Cliff Schrock*

## WELL DONE FAITHFUL SERVANTS

Special thanks to Gary Messerschmitt, Cliff Schrock, Kendra Norman, and Greg Dowling, who are coming off of the Board of Directors this year. We thank you for your dedicated and faithful service to Holy Cross.

## A HEARTFELT "THANK YOU"

A note of thanks was received by Adele Buck in early January. She and John are very appreciative of all the thoughts and prayers that give both of them a spiritual boost while Adele goes through her medical treatments, tests, etc. In their note they *"thank the congregation for their prayers, phone calls and cards of encouragement."*

Please continue to keep Adele in your prayers for healing, comfort and strength.

### We love to hear from you!

If you have any news, notes, or acknowledgments that you'd like to share with the congregation...please let us know!  
Submissions are due by the 10th of the month preceding the edition date. Email [office@holycrosstrumbull.com](mailto:office@holycrosstrumbull.com)



# BUILDING BLOCKS

from Holy Cross Christian Preschool

In February the children will explore **good nutrition and healthy habits**, learning what is needed to take good care of the bodies that God gave us. They will also be busy making Valentines for all their friends and families. We will celebrate Valentine's Day with a special ice cream sundae party!

**Our Language and Literacy activities will focus on Nursery Rhymes, rhyming activities and ending sounds.** We will sing silly songs that help us learn what it means to rhyme. The 4-year-old class will also begin a special writing program that mirrors that of the Trumbull Public Schools. The 4-year-old class is also exploring the concept of addition and subtraction. This is done through hands-on experiences with manipulatives, felt boards, songs and poems. They will also practice graphing skills using candy-conversation hearts.

**Our Bible stories will focus on how Jesus is our good friend.** The stories include Jesus Blesses the Children, Mary and Martha, Jesus Forgives Zacchaeus and The Ten Lepers. The children – and teachers – look forward to Thursdays because we have our Chapel Time with Pastor Erb! He always gives us a chance to participate in the reading of the Bible stories with fun actions! He also teaches us a new song every week!

## LOOKING FOR A GREAT PRESCHOOL?

Registration for the 2023-2024 school year is ongoing, with both full-time and part-time options. Class sizes are limited. Please recommend us to your family and friends! Contact Michele Glennon, at 203-268-6471 or [preschool@holycrosstrumbull.com](mailto:preschool@holycrosstrumbull.com).

## A(NOTHER) NEW YEAR OF MINISTRY *(Continued from page 1)*

watered that seed, but God will use us to bring them into the church.

But this will take work. It will require us to be good stewards of the gifts God has given. In the next few months, we will begin talking about stewardship in more specific ways and encourage you to think about how you can use your time, talent, and treasures to invest in kingdom work. But in the meantime, begin thinking now about the ways in which God has uniquely planted you at Holy Cross to be able to use your gifts for the benefit of others.

### THE THREE S'S

I get it—there is a lot to think about. But we can simplify all this down to what I call the three “S’s.” No matter what we end up doing, we can funnel our plans into three areas of ministry life: social, spiritual, and service.

God created us for community, so what events and programs can we implement that will help us grow closer as friends and family? But we aren't just a place for friends to gather. Through worship, Bible study, and prayer, we want to grow spiritually strong so that we are guided by God's Word and firmly planted in his truth and promises. And finally, how can we combine those two elements and put our faith into action? In what ways can we work together to serve each other, our congregation as a whole, and the community we live in?

What exciting times await us! Hopefully you can see that this is not just another year of ministry, but that God is leading us into something new! A new year to celebrate what God has already done and to look forward to where He will take us from here. +

# When Colleagues Think Your Faith Is a Joke

Continued from page 3

## 4 STEPS

Let's look at a few steps you can take to improve your experience at work *and* represent Christ more fully.

### 1. Look for seed-planting opportunities.

For some of your coworkers, you may be the only exposure they have to authentic Christianity. Don't let the media or the confident online atheists tell them who Jesus is. Set the record straight. You have an opportunity to represent Christ well through your interactions at work. Such intentionality could lead to seed-planting opportunities (1 Cor. 3:6-9) as the Holy Spirit may be at work in their hearts.

### 2. Defend the faith.

Many Christians hesitate to share their faith for the very reason you've brought up: they worry others will think it's a joke. This often comes from the perception that Christianity is a baseless belief system.

But we're all responsible to defend the faith when asked (1 Pet. 3:15). This may require you to speak to the effects of the gospel (why it matters), the real message of the gospel (what it really says), or the reliability of the biblical texts that contain the gospel message (why we can believe it).

Of course, it takes some preparation on your part to be able to speak to these things. I'd encourage you to do a little research into Christian apologetics. It'll help you confidently speak to the signifi-

cance and the reliability of the faith you hold dear; it'll also likely fortify your own faith as you're reminded just how reasonable the Christian faith is.

### 3. Engage in fellowship.

Christian fellowship is too often neglected by busy professionals. You'll fare much better if you have a community of brothers and sisters walking alongside you. They'll serve as prayer warriors, accountability partners, and a space to discuss common challenges through the lens of a shared biblical worldview.

If you don't already have such a community, think about how you can create one. Consider bringing up workplace topics when you meet with your church small group. Schedule weekly coffee with a couple of friends from church who work in similar industries. Start a Bible study at work, meeting over lunch or before the workday begins. You may be surprised how many Christians come out of the woodwork at your invitation.

### 4. Keep work in perspective.

Most professionals spend a *lot* of time working. Because of this, what happens at work tends to become inflated in our minds. I'm guilty of this. When I led a team, if my team exceeded their quarterly targets, I was on cloud nine. When we lost a deal we thought was in the bag, it felt like the end of the world. Similarly, when we face opposition to our faith at work, we can feel incredibly alone.

Maintain your mindset and stay anchored in the truth. God is on the throne. You're not alone. You belong to the body of Christ. Surround yourself with others who will remind you of that. Remain anchored in Jesus and don't neglect prayer and time in the Word. These spiritual disciplines will prevent you from losing sight of the bigger picture.

You'll fare much better if you have a community of brothers and sisters walking alongside you.

You mentioned your coworkers aren't mean, so I hope these words have met you where you are. If the situation goes deeper or begins to become more hostile, remember your options. Consider a discussion with an HR contact if there's religious discrimination in your workplace. Ask God for wisdom and seek the advice of a trusted pastor or mentor if the situation is interfering with your spiritual health and well-being.

Finally, thank you for being a light within the darkness of your workplace. God is with you and he can use you there.

**By Miranda Carls.** *Used by Permission. Original article can be found at [www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/colleagues-think-faith-joke/](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/colleagues-think-faith-joke/)*

# A Study in Acts

from Cliff Schrock

## ACTS 21:1-40

*In this “Bible Study on Paper,” to this point we have learned how the Christian church expanded from a core group of believers in a small region to overseas and to “the ends of the earth.” We’ve been reading about Paul’s missionary journeys and the fact the message he was preaching was and is universal for everyone. After you have read Chapter 21, please pick up with this analysis.*

With our journey through Acts now three-fourths complete, we can easily start making summary points. One is that if Jesus, Our Savior, had not risen from the dead, there would be no Book of Acts. The growth of the Christian church, then and now, is based on the salvation Christ earned for sinful man. Another point specifically at this moment is that Paul is more reflective as he senses an even more difficult road ahead for him. After you have read Chapter 21, please pick up with this analysis.

As Chapter 21 begins, Paul and his fellow travelers are back “on the road” in his third missionary journey, having bid farewell to the leaders of Ephesus. In this and other farewells, Paul is sensing that he will never again see so many people he dearly loved. He had a parting message for all the faithful to take care of the church and to be on guard about elements that would try to cause chaos within the church. Their ship made stops at Cos (a Greek island), Rhodes, Patara; from there the travelers went on a ship headed to Phoenicia; they continued past Cyprus and landed at Tyre in Syria. Paul and the group stayed for seven days, visiting with other Believers. It was that group of faithful that told Paul the

Spirit had warned that he should not go to Jerusalem. But after the seven days, the group boarded the ship amidst a grand farewell. Arriving at Caesarea they went to the house of the evangelist, Philip, who in Chapter 6 had been chosen as a deacon and who had experienced great success preaching in Samaria after Stephen had been martyred. Philip had also been the one to convert the Ethiopian eunuch in Chapter 8.

While Paul and Company stayed in the area, a prophet named Agabus arrived, and in a symbolic gesture he took Paul’s belt and tied his own hands and feet with it and prophesied that “this is the way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.” The clear meaning of danger to Paul was met with concern by his hosts that Paul should not travel to Jerusalem. But on the contrary, Paul said he would not be put off on his goal and said “I am ready not only to be bound but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” We can use that same message today to never stop from proceeding along the course laid out by the Holy Spirit. That’s what Paul did and he was supported by remarks by the group that “the Lord’s will be done.”

After this time with Philip, Luke writes that the group headed for Jerusalem, accompanied by disciples from Caesarea, stopping at the House of Mnason of Cyprus. Paul did not give in to his great trepidation about Jerusalem. Their arrival started well, with the Believers excited to see them. That ended a portion in Acts from 13:1 to 21:17 that discussed how the church extended overseas. Verse 18 to the end of Acts will focus on Paul, the church’s leader, being on trial. Paul then visited James and the elders and reported how God had blessed his ministry. But Paul had to solve a problem with Jews zealous for the law of Moses. He went through the Rite of Purification with four men in the temple. But the zealots kept inciting the crowd with slanderous accusations. Paul was overwhelmed and assaulted but the beating stopped when the tribune and soldiers came upon the scene. Not able to make sense of the attack, the tribune brought Paul to the barracks, but just before entering, Paul asked permission to speak to the crowd. Once the people quieted down, Paul began speaking to them in Hebrew. That will be the cliffhanger to start the next chapter. +

**Sources** | Harper Study Bible; The Everyday Bible: New Testament; Egermeier’s Bible Story Book; The Acts of the Apostles, Neal M. Flanagan.

**Next Month:** Acts, Chapter 22, which documents the defense Paul lays out before the rabid crowd of Jews who minutes earlier had wanted to tear Paul apart.

# THE WORD OF LIFE

from Cliff Schrock

In this supplement to Pastor Erb's monthly focus on a Bible Verse of the Month, the February theme is "Love One Another," with the Biblical reference of Galatians chapter 5.

There are many acts that we do that come from love, and in February, the month of love as Valentine's Day is celebrated, the Bible verse focus illustrates Paul's love for his fellow Believers. These are people he met with and taught and encouraged to become faithful Christians during his missionary journeys.

In particular for this study, many were converted in Galatia due to Paul's preaching on his first missionary journey. But when he left the area, it didn't take long for false teachers to move in and claim that Paul was the false teacher who didn't give the full story. They said it wasn't just faith in Christ that saved, but also continuing to take part in Jewish traditions. So the Gentile converts were told they weren't really saved unless they were also doing the acts of a practicing Jew.

So this letter was damage control and it begins with Paul recalling his life and how he went from a persecutor of God's church to preacher of the Gospel and the travels he went on to accomplish his mission. Chapter 3 begins with Paul calling the Galatians "foolish" and they were

"bewitched" by others and deceived. He begins to go over all the key points again of what he had instructed them. Paul's words are strong and firm to counteract the attacks he's been under by a group of liars; the young Christian converts were especially susceptible to being lured away from Paul's teachings. He urges them not to go back to the slavery of focusing on ungodly elements. By the time we are at chapter 5, Paul has countered the theme of slavery with its remedy: freedom and the effect Christian liberty has on faithful Believers.

In verse 6 he writes that the "only thing that counts is faith working through love." God's Spirit gives that freedom, and then he further defines freedom with Verse 13, our monthly focus: "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

Out of his love for his fellow Christians, Paul makes the distinction that we are not free to serve our human nature and ourselves, but we are free from sin, as bought by Christ, to obey the moral law of God and how we relate to other people. He refers back to Leviticus 19:18 in that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Some translations use the word "slave" instead of "serve" one another but serve has a better connotation to how we are to act. +

*Prayer: Dear God, we often struggle to see how we have been freed to be Christians who serve others rather than to serve ourselves. Help us to realize and see the times when through Christian love we can faithfully serve and love one another. Amen.*



LENT

AT HOLY CROSS

ASH WEDNESDAY - FEBRUARY 22

7:00 PM

WEDNESDAY PRAYER SERVICES MARCH 1 - MARCH 29



# Celebrating this Month

**FEBRUARY**

It's fun to be recognized on your special day! Even more so, it's special to know others are praying for you. It is our hope that as you spend time in daily prayer, you will remember your fellow Holy Cross members on their special day.

## **BIRTHDAYS**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Name</i>
2	Joe Ciccio
3	David Skoog
4	Thomasina Petrahai
5	Jennifer Deloge
9	Alexander Carola
11	Peter Antoniou
11	Kevin Halls
12	Ethan Gagliardi
13	Alyssa (Cerone) Jenkins
13	Mary Ann Schiller
14	Julianne Nyitrai
15	Tom Ferik
22	Ann Bruggemann
24	Luke Riccio
27	Jack Messerschmitt
28	Chad Helminger
28	Emily Rentz
29	Jesse Kravecs

## **WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Name</i>
18	Greg and Laura Dowling
18	Jim and Deb Leslie

## **BAPTISM BIRTHDAYS**

Bob Burns  
Alexander Carola  
Kyle Helminger  
William Malmstedt  
Jordan Matthews  
Thomasina Petrahai  
Alex Riccio  
Andrew Struzik  
Paul Vaitkus  
Marcia Wilson

*If there is someone that should be on one of these lists, but isn't...please alert the office so we can update our records!*