

# THE CROSSWORD

January 2023

A PUBLICATION OF HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH

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## THE UPS AND DOWNS OF MINISTRY

from Pastor Nathan Erb

With the Annual Meeting on the horizon, I thought it would be interesting to go back through 60+ years of Annual Reports to see what helpful information they might reveal as we head into 2023. *I'll admit it: I've only been able to get back through the past twenty-five years before the deadline of this article.* It was enough, however, to reveal a few significant areas of interest for us today. **One of those is in the area of membership and worship attendance.**

According to the 1997 report, baptized membership numbered 621 that year, and attendance was 190 on an average weekend. Fast forward to 2021, and the total number of members was 266 with an average attendance of 73. If you'd like to avoid the COVID years, we can go back to 2019, when membership was 284 and attendance was 91. To put it simply, over the past 25 years, both numbers have dropped by more than 50%. I also found it fascinating that while the total numbers decreased, the average percentage between members and

attendance stayed nearly the same at around 32%.

It would be easy to chalk this up to a variety of general factors, including the fact that church numbers around the globe have also dropped in the past 20 years. Interestingly, however, while church numbers were going down, the number of people living in our community was going up! Which means there are more people to share the Gospel with!

Significant to me, from reading these reports, were the words from the pastor year after year. (*I'll concede the fact that I only have the written report and not the lived experience to draw from.*) The decline in worship attendance was certainly noted (and felt), and various strategies to reinvigorate participation were offered. In one such instance, a call to repent for violation of the Third Commandment was pressed upon the congregation. Based on the numbers for the following year, it didn't seem to work.

Similarly, I noticed a repeated call to reach out to the community and share the good news of Jesus! This

is, after all, the mission of the church. And, while I noticed in other reports by various commissions that there was a lot of activity—including cooking and serving meals, donations of supplies and food to local charities, and events open to the larger community—the numbers continued to drop.

Now, numbers are just numbers. They are only a part of the story. But numbers are important. They give us a snapshot and the opportunity to ask important questions. What do you make of these statistics, and do they move you in any way? Why do you think they are trending the way they are? **Is there anything we can do to change their direction?**

These are questions worth asking. We learn from the scriptures that it is God's Word that grows faith in hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit. We have zero control over whether we grow or not, but we do have control over whether or not we sow the seeds, where we sow them, and how much water and nutrients we give them.

(Continued on page 5)

# PRESIDENT'S JOURNAL

Kerry Geffert

In about two weeks, Holy Cross voting members will receive notification of the 2023 Annual Voters' Meeting. I'm sure you are all looking forward to it! 😊 However, I encourage you to read the materials that you will receive. This year's meeting has the potential to impact how we operate as a congregation for years to come. Last month I alluded to proposed changes to our governance. These changes will be on the agenda. Here are two major topics that will face us:

**Bylaws revision** - Our current Bylaws were written for a different time. For years we have been unable to fill all the called-for commission committees, or even the Board positions. You will have the opportunity to vote on a proposed Bylaws revision that is reflective of volunteering trends, and which allows some flexibility as times change, but is still true to our mission and our Constitution. The changes will encourage a more strategic oversight perspective by a smaller Board, and provide for greater member engagement while being respectful of time commitments. Here's a hint – I'm advocating for the removal of the commission structure. Then how will we function? I'll leave that for your reading of the proposed revisions.

**2023 Budget** - Over the years our budget has become increasingly driven by salary and administration costs and less by programs (think

education, outreach, community service, etc.). Pastor's fresh perspective is helping us understand that if we are to grow as a congregation, this balance must change. Though the budget is not yet finalized as I write this, I have encouraged our Board of Directors to dream. Let's think about what we hope to accomplish and budget accordingly, rather than budget for a minimum and fund the rest with special offerings or unrecognized donations. This approach will require a vote of faith by our congregation. If we want these programs to occur, we must be willing to fund them.

Change can be hard, and the proposals before our congregation are asking you to take leaps of faith. After reading through the materials, you're bound to have questions. Rather than wait until the Voters' Meeting, a **Town Hall** has been scheduled to provide you with an opportunity to learn the context of these changes and ask questions. The Town Hall will be Monday, January 23, at 7:30 pm in the Froehlich Fellowship Hall. Attending then can help you make an informed vote at the Voters' Meeting.

Will you join me in making 2023 the best year yet in Holy Cross' rich, Christ-centered history? ➕



# HOLY CROSS

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**Sunday Worship** | 10:00 a.m.

**Bible Class** | 9:00 a.m.

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## THE CROSSWORD

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# THE WORD OF LIFE

Cliff Schrock

In this sidebar to Pastor Erb's monthly focus on the Bible Verse of the Month, the theme is "do great things," with the Biblical reference Mark chapter 10.

Following the astonishing Transfiguration, Jesus and His disciples got into many philosophical conversations as they went on their travels, including one on "who is the greatest" while in Capernaum. Jesus had also shocked a rich young man who had asked Jesus how to attain "the life that never ends" by telling him to give away all his possessions and give the money to the poor.

But the teaching moment for Jesus and the one that is the root of the January theme, Do Great Things, occurred while the disciples were en route to Jerusalem. James and John had famously asked Jesus that when He was in His glory would He allow them to sit one on each side of Him.

After Jesus had begun explaining a little about why this was quite difficult, and the other 10 had shown their anger at such impudence, Jesus said, in Mark 10:43-45, "... whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The juxtaposition of "great" and "servant," "first" and "slave of all" in this moment is one of the toughest teachings for a Christian to accept. The world we live in would have us believe that being great is the ultimate and being weak is for losers. The idea of lowering ourselves as a way of elevating us, though, is a brilliant concept. "Great" and "first" are easy enough for us to understand. They are the ultimate in life, desirable for notoriety, glory, security. But "servant" and "slave" mean work, subjugation, and being under someone's control with thoughts of freedom out of the question.

Jesus, however, blunts that bleak contrast with the next phrase in our Mark reading that even He Himself came to earth not to be served, honored and elevated but to serve and do so in the ultimate fashion: to give his life as a ransom for many.

That extreme sacrifice of death doesn't have to be our sacrifice; Jesus' death and resurrection ensures our salvation. But by emphasizing Jesus' servanthood, the lesson is for all of us to follow as He lived, seek out ways to be helpful for our fellow man, and to eschew desires for power and status. To do so is to not be great, but to do great things. +

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, help us to realize those times when we fail to show a willingness to serve and rather a preference to be great. Instead help us to be slaves to serving and in that way show we can do great things. Amen.*

# IN CHRIST

## A STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

ONE STUDY - TWO TIMES // BEGINS JANUARY 15

Sunday Morning 9:00am  
Wednesday Evening 8:00 pm

# NOTEWORTHY

News, Notes, & Acknowledgements from the Holy Cross Community

## FROM THE EVANGELISM DIRECTOR

As Evangelism Commission Director over the last couple years, I have written a monthly message of encouragement for readers to see ways they can spread the news about Christ and Holy Cross, particularly in our own church as workers. Now, as the end of the latest church term approaches, there's no reason to stop drumming home that point.

Last month this report ended with commission member Elisabeth Erb's words regarding why it's important for church members to extend themselves, primarily saying, "It is important to extend ourselves as church body members because it is what we are called to do...Having active members is important to keeping a church body strong and helping it grow."

In the December Board of Directors meeting, Pastor Erb remarked that pretty much every area of what Holy Cross does should have some element of evangelism to it. The Board is looking into how the church budget can better reflect in the future putting funds into ministry-type programs as opposed to just brick-and-mortar and staff expenses.

In a normal definition, evangelism is the "zealous advocacy of a cause." It's no surprise that one of

the greatest evangelists, John the Baptist, was often described as a zealot.

Christian evangelism is the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ by public preaching or personal witness. Energizing that activism at Holy Cross will be a goal you'll see emphasized by church leadership going forward.

Happy New Year!

*Cliff Schrock*

## CARE PACKAGE THANK YOU

This note of thanks was received by Matt and Jenn Rentz in response to the Shepherds' Commission sending our college students care packages,

*Thank you for the care packages that you sent to Emily and Ethan! They wanted us to extend a thank you and tell you how much they appreciated the gesture. It was a wonderful way to stay connected while they are at school! Thank you.*

*P.S. - Their roommates loved the package as well!!*

## ADVENT NIGHT THANK YOU

A very special thank you to Pastor Nathan and Elisabeth for organizing such a wonderful family Advent wreath box-making event. Little did we know that our

Shepherd is also a gifted carpenter who displayed his skills by constructing the boxes for the wreaths! What a beautiful way to begin the Advent season. Hopefully this will become an annual event. Thank you to all who helped set up and clean up and to Laurie Vaitkus, Michele Van Wart and Pat Deloge for preparing the dinner.

## FROM THE WORSHIP DIRECTORS

Many hands certainly did make light work on Saturday December 3. The sanctuary was scrubbed and polished along with all the silver and brass. Thanks to all who gave of their time and talent as we prepare for the Christmas season. Everything looks beautiful.

Thank you to Cheryl Mayeran, Mary Atkinson, Edith Skoog, Dan Senft, John Deloge, Bill Magyar, Lorraine and Jim Finch, Mary Ann and Dave Schiller, Laurie and Paul Vaitkus, Donna Bogen, Donna DiLalla, the Erb Family and Kerry Geffert.

The following day our Christmas tree and sanctuary came alive with Christmas decorations. Thank you to the many people who lent a hand as we prepared to celebrate the birth of our Savior.

*Pat Deloge, Donna Senft*

### 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

**H**appy New Year! After more than a week off for the holidays we are getting back into the school routine. In January we will be exploring the season of winter. We will have an in-depth study of animals and how they survive in the winter. We will learn which animals migrate, which ones hibernate and even talk about the animals that make no change to their habitat. The children will learn what makes snow, as well as the process of freezing and melting.

We are also teaching the children the correct way of writing the letters of the alphabet. We use the “Foundation” writing program that makes it fun and simple.

Our Bible stories this month will help to show the children the love and mercy of our amazing Savior! We will include the story of Jesus as a young boy and then move on to how Jesus helps and heals us. We will learn how Jesus heals a blind man and feeds the 5,000, as well as talk about the parables of the Lost Son and the Good Samaritan.

## LOOKING FOR A GREAT PRESCHOOL?

Registration for the 2023-2024 school year begins January 9. Please recommend us to your family and friends! Contact Michele Glennon, at 203-268-6471 or [preschool@holycrosstrumbull.com](mailto:preschool@holycrosstrumbull.com).

## THE UPS AND DOWNS OF MINISTRY

*(Continued from page 1)*

You'll read in the President's Journal about a proposal we are making to take a bold step for Holy Cross. It involves a change in the leadership structure, but it's not just change for the sake of change, nor is it about control or influence. In fact, it's the opposite. The goal of this proposal is to afford every member of the congregation the opportunity to participate in the mission of the church and engage our community with the Gospel of Hope. You have been called by God to this place, not just to be fed by God's Word and His gifts, but to use the gifts, skills, passions, and resources that God has given you in loving service to our neighbors.

**As we look forward to what God will do through these efforts, there are two things I'm asking each of you to do.**

**1) Pray.** God gives the growth, so we need to rely on Him to do what He's best at. In fact, enlarging and establishing an intentional Prayer Team will be vital to our mission and goals.

**2) Know God's Word.** God uses His Word to grow faith. In order to reach out to our community with the Gospel - we need to know His Word! Join me for Bible Study at church, every Sunday at 9:00 a.m., complete with coffee and treats. *See the promotion on page 3 about a four-week study that will also be offered on Wednesday nights.*

I am excited about the possibilities that are ahead of us. I am excited to see how God will use each of you in the coming months and years. I'm excited for the creative ideas and exciting opportunities in store for us. I am excited to see the trend in the numbers start to go back up—not just to reverse a trend, but because it will show that God is at work expanding His kingdom—and using us to do so. +

# MAKING A LIST AND CHECKING IT TWICE

Mary Schrock—Covenant to Care for Children Liaison

- ✓ A beginner guitar
- ✓ Drawing and coloring supplies
- ✓ Hot Wheels cars and a track
- ✓ A Kohls gift card to buy a pair of boots
- ✓ A new wallet
- ✓ Make-up (so I can fit in with my friends)

That's just six of the 72 Christmas gifts that Holy Cross members and friends purchased for the 36 children in the caseload of Holy Cross' DCF social worker, Mimose Laurenard, through the Covenant to Care for Children (CCC) program. Each child received two gifts: a gift bag with a winter hat and mittens/gloves set and the specific gift that they wished for. Many of the teenagers received gift cards so that they could do shopping for clothing or shoes that they wanted. What completely overwhelmed me this year was the extra care and generosity shown in the gift-giving. So many of the gifts were accompanied with extra gift cards in \$10 or \$15 amounts, fancy chapstick, extra make-up accessories and holiday candy.

The annual "Giving Tree" project began on Sunday, November 20, with our members taking turns selecting an ornament or mitten tag(s) from the tree poster and agreeing to purchase the gift listed on the tag. By December 11 all 72 gifts had arrived and were wrapped and Mimose picked them up to begin delivering on the 13th.

"Thank You" to the following people who participated in our Christmas "Giving Tree" project by taking such great care and love to

shop for and donate a gift: *the Anantharaj Family, Tim and Daisy Benson, Nicole Benson-Ayisi, Donna and Dave Bogen, Dee Bruggemann, Bob and Carol Burns, Gabe and Deb Cavacchioli (friends of the Erbs), Joe and Cindy Ciccia, Pat and John Deloge, Diane Dietman, Gary and Donna DiLalla, Nancy Dolan, Cely Eler, Bill and Christine Flammann, Paul Hagberg, the Helminger Family, Donna and Gary Jackson, Ingrid and Dieter Leibold, Bill Magyar, the Martineli Family, Cheryl Mayeran, Kristen and Gary Messerschmitt, Kendra Norman, Audrey Paray, Audrey Paray's aide Diana, the Rentz Family, Alexis Rodriguez, Donna Rodriguez, Marissa Rodriguez, Nancy and Gerry Sabol, David and Mary Ann Schiller, Cliff and Mary Schrock, Donna and Dan Senft, Maura and Charlie Senft, the Sylling Family, and Rick and Michele Van Wart.*

Special thanks also to a few of our members who gave monetary gifts to help with any last-minute gifts that needed to be purchased; and to all the "anonymous people" who donated winter hat and mitten/glove sets in the weeks leading up to mid-November and all those who provided gift bags and tissue paper.

Mimose was so grateful for the love shown to the children in her caseload through the giving of gifts. And as the CCC liaison, I am so grateful for your donations, as approximately \$2,200 worth of "gifts" were given by our church family for this Christmas project to children being serviced by this outreach ministry. You are a blessing to these children who have unstable homes and are in crisis and need.



*Presents wrapped and ready to be brought to 36 children in the greater Trumbull area this Christmas.*



# A Study in Acts

## ACTS 20:1-38

*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 third missionary journey and the fact the message he was preaching was and is universal for everyone. After you have read Chapter 20, please pick up with this analysis.*

Chapter 19 ended with the chaos in Ephesus, in which the worshippers of Diana had been riled up by the silversmiths who profited off of her image. Gaius and Aristarchus, disciples of Paul’s, had been captured. But after some convincing by a city official a couple hours later, the crowd let the men go before anything regretful could happen.

As we continue on with the incredible story of the church’s growth, I hope you have been amazed and inspired by its development, primarily of the courage and fortitude required to expand God’s kingdom. The events of Chapter 20 are on the cusp of a particularly difficult time for Paul. But before that, we learn he had been planning on leaving Ephesus before the city chaos. Ephesus had been a place of great achievement for Paul; he had spent more time there than any other location on his travels. He likely wrote his first letter to the Corinthians while there.

But Paul’s enemies are trying to close in on him. He went to churches such as Philippi and Thessalonica in

Macedonia and Corinth in Greece, before Jerusalem. In Greece, though, after three months there Paul learned of a plot to capture him on the sea as he sailed to Syria and he foiled it by going back by land the same way he had come back through Macedonia. He was accompanied by at least seven comrades, who went ahead to Troas. Paul spent several days in Troas and on the eve of leaving for Jerusalem he spent the night with other believers in a meal reminiscent of the Last Supper.

Paul felt a sense of foreboding that this would be the last time he’d see these believers. He preached until midnight with a full heart to say many things. An anecdote from that sermon was that a young man named Eutychus was listening while sitting in an open window on the third floor. He got sleepy and fell to the ground. People raced to help him but he had died. But in one of the most amazing miracles not performed by Jesus, Paul reached the man, put his arms around him, and told the crowd to not worry, that Eutychus was still alive. The relieved bystanders took the man away alive.

Paul continued his sermon until daybreak, left Troas, and traveled along the coast, stopping at Assos, Mitylene, Chios, Samos, Miletus. He sent a message ahead to the elders at Ephesus and asked to meet them. The Ephesus leaders met him there, again with Paul sensing he would never again see these people he dearly loved. He spoke earnestly to them that he had lived among them, taught them in their homes, testified to both Jews and Greeks, and was feeling compelled to go to Jerusalem. He had great unease to go there, sensing he may suffer but not being afraid of that possibility.

Paul’s faith was so strong that he said he didn’t care how long he lived, but he would finish the work God had given him with joy. Paul urged his listeners to take care of the church and he would pray for them. He warned of savage wolves who would come in to disrupt the church and to be alert and support the weak.⊕

**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 21 which records Paul’s long journey to Rome and Caesar, and depicts him as suffering servant.

# DO GREAT THINGS.

*from Pastor Nathan Erb*

Whether it's the Marvel variety, featuring characters with supernatural powers, or historical accounts of ordinary people doing extraordinary things, everyone loves a good hero story. While there may be an exciting story that occasionally emerges from our day-to-day existence, it's probably safe to assume that you wouldn't classify yourself as any kind of hero. After all, heroes do great things. They go above and beyond! They rise to the challenge and overcome it. They face insurmountable odds and, in the end, always come out on top!

But don't count yourself out so fast. I think there's a case to be made that there's a superhero in all of us. No, you can't fly, run faster than a speeding bullet, or leap tall buildings in a single bound, but you are capable of doing great things—even greater things, actually!

But don't take my word for it. Take it from the greatest hero who ever lived! Jesus tells His disciples what it means to truly be great and to do great things. "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all."

**WHOEVER WOULD BE GREAT AMONG YOU MUST BE YOUR SERVANT, AND WHOEVER WOULD BE FIRST AMONG YOU MUST BE SLAVE OF ALL. FOR EVEN THE SON OF MAN CAME NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM FOR MANY. MARK 10:43B-45**

That sounds a bit backward, doesn't it? Jesus is essentially saying that the path to greatness isn't determined by who gets to the top of the ladder first, but rather by who stays at the bottom to hold it steady. True greatness is not determined by who is seen by men but by who God sees behind the scenes. True, it doesn't feel like greatness, but your everyday service to the people you encounter is just as, if not more, important than someone who makes it into the Hall of Fame, cures a once-thought-to-be incurable disease, or has millions of followers on TikTok. Why? Because Jesus, who gave His life for the whole world, says that "even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." Making a name for yourself is the definition of greatness in the world, but serving others in the name of Jesus is where greatness really counts. And service to others can be done in big ways or small ways. But no matter which way you serve; when you do, you do great things. Just make sure you don't leave the house without your cape!+



# Celebrating this Month

**JANUARY**

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**

*Date Name*

2 Lucy Kravecs  
6 Cheryl Conte  
12 Caroline Hron Weigle  
12 Charlie Hron Weigle  
12 William Malmstedt  
16 Susan Antoniou  
16 Lauren Gagliardi  
17 Emily Struzik  
18 Kathy Boivie  
23 Sydney Fitzmorris  
25 Brandon Matthews  
27 Ron Sjoblom  
29 Emily Hron Weigle  
30 Karen Geffert

## **WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES**

*Date Name*

6 Michael & Amanda Weldon  
21 Andrew & Lydia Struzik

## **BAPTISM BIRTHDAYS**

John Anantharaj  
Joanne Bogen  
Ingrid Cerone  
Kristen Cerone  
Patsy Cerone  
Keith Chirgwin  
Roberta Crocker  
Audrey Gomes  
Kaiden Gomes  
Michael Halls  
Bret Helminger  
Buella John  
Sheryl John  
Peggy Liptack  
Ryan Matthews  
Kendra Norman  
Marissa Rodriguez  
Cliff Schrock  
Laurie Vaitkus

*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!*