

LIFELINES



of LORD OF LIFE LUTHERAN CHURCH

Phone: (972) 867-5588

Fax: (972) 985-5588

Internet Home Page: <http://planolutheran.com>

Vol. 37, No. 10

Plano, Texas

October 2023

O Lord, what are you up to and what do you want us to do?

Last month I wrote about the decline in church membership that is happening throughout America and is projected to continue. I cited demographic studies and some recent books that offer various explanations and a few suggestions on what we can do about it. This month I want to continue on this topic but from a theological perspective.

While Christian leaders acknowledge that the decline is happening, there are firm theological disagreements about why it is happening and what can be done about it. So, this month instead of asking, *What is happening in the Church and why is it in decline?* I am essentially asking: *Why is God allowing the Church to decline and what, if anything, can we do about it?*

To get us thinking about how to answer these questions, let's start by considering two opposite theses that attempt to explain the decline in the Church in America and what can be done about:

1. All depends on God. He is withholding His Spirit due to an increase in sinfulness. There is nothing we can do that will make any difference at all to grow the Church and stop the inevitable decline.
2. All depends on us. God is willing, but we must work harder. If we aren't lazy and afraid to try new things, we can discover ways to work and reach the lost and bring them into Christ's Church.

These positions couldn't be further apart, and yet, we can find Biblical support for each one. For example, consider the following for the first position that everything depends on God and the situation is out of our hands:

Thesis 1. At various times Israel faced God's harsh judgment for her unfaithfulness. At such times the prophet said the nation would suffer and the nation suffered. An example of this is Jeremiah. See the first part of chapter 15 where the prophet pleads for the Lord to relent in His judgment against Israel, but God replies, **"Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go!"** –And following this pronouncement, many in Israel were forced into exile in Babylon. While the nation of Israel and the Holy Christian Church are not exactly the same, nevertheless, this and other texts are strong reminders that although God is patient and kind, His patience has an end. God will not be mocked nor will He allow evil to continue indefinitely. When evil reaches a certain level, He will intervene and punish. That is how some interpret what is happening to the Church in America today. We aren't growing and won't grow any time soon because God is angry at the wickedness and judging us harshly.

We can also find support for the first thesis in the New Testament. Consider the missionary activities of Paul and Timothy. Without any explanation, we read in Acts 16:6 **"And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia."** At that time and in that

place, God forbade these missionaries to evangelize, preferring instead to send them elsewhere. Was there some special judgment against the people of Asia? Not that we know of. The presumption is that their efforts would just be better spent in another place, so God sent them to Macedonia but forbid them “to speak the word in Asia.”

Our experience also tells us that there seem to be times when certain places are not “good soil” for the Gospel. For example, think of predominantly Muslim countries or totalitarian states where churches are forbidden and Christians are ruthlessly persecuted. No one looks at a place like North Korea, Iran, or Afghanistan and thinks, “The reason those churches don’t grow is because they don’t have a praise band!” No, in such situations the hindrances to the spread of the Gospel are far more complicated. The things preventing the churches from growth are not poor evangelism tactics and a lack of love or hard work. It seems that instead, major societal currents wrought by the hand of God are preventing His Church from thriving in some places.

Now let’s consider the alternative thesis, that everything depends on us and if we are faithful and willing to work hard for the Gospel, more will come to believe:

Thesis 2. We read statements in Scripture that direct us to what we can do to change the situation and cause the Church to increase. This passage from Matthew is frequently cited as an example: “[Jesus] said to his disciples, **‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’**” (Matthew 9:37-38) Here Jesus tells us that many are waiting to be brought into the Kingdom and what is needed to make that happen is more laborers. He also instructs us to pray earnestly for the Lord to send more laborers, implying that in some way our prayers will have an effect on the outcome of the mission. So, some believe that if you want more Christians, we need to pray more.

Another passage cited in support of the second thesis is: **“I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.”** (1st Corinthians 9:22b) In the full context of this passage (verses 9:15-23), Paul unmistakably says he has worked hard at relating to different people of different backgrounds and ethnicities in order that he might “win more of them.” The implication is that if he had not adopted certain practices, fewer people would have received the Gospel and come to faith in Christ. Thus, his efforts and actions played a part in the spread of the Gospel and increased the number of Christians. Some Christians believe this is the key in order to see a change in the decline of the Church in America.

So, there you have it: two opposite theological statements each with Biblical support. Which is more correct and how are we to think about this? Which Biblical truth should we apply to the current situation? Further, what should we do about it? Should we sit back and say, *This is God’s will, there is nothing we can do*? Or, should we say, *If we get to work today, our actions can turn everything around*?

There’s an old saying that goes: “Pray as if everything depends on God, but work as though everything depends on you.” I think something similar applies in this situation.

God encourages us to pray about this issue in particular and He can intervene in incredible ways. But we do not tell God what to do when we pray. All our prayers are offered in accordance with His will and that it be done. God could be angry with this nation and have it in mind to harden the hearts of the wicked. When one looks at the millions of abortions that have occurred or the removal of any overt expression of religion from the public square, not to mention the sexual exploitation of children and widespread celebration of sodomy and pornography, etc. etc. it seems that in many ways America is an increasingly pagan nation that has turned away from the Lord. In light of this, could anyone blame God if He punished us and withheld His blessings? Maybe He is “handing us over” to our passions and lusts and giving us what we deserve? (See Romans 1:24-32) If so, then all our work of evangelism may amount to very little. In other words, the soil here in America may be inhospitable to the seed of God’s Word. (Matthew 13)

Then again, even if God is going to withhold some blessings from us in the future and bring about judgment against evildoers making it very difficult to see an increase in the Church, He nevertheless commands His

disciples to make more disciples and to proclaim the Gospel. He still urges us to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers. At times the results of these prayers and laborers may be impressive, yielding tremendous results. At other times the results may be barely noticeable –which is what seems to be happening now. We Christians need to keep in mind that even if the results are less than stellar, that's okay. We still have our work to do no matter the outcome. Of course we can always reflect about how our work could be done better, and we can never say too many prayers for His kingdom to come.

We might sum this all up by saying: God gives us work to do and it should be done and done faithfully, but in the end, the results are always and only in His hands. (Cp. 1st Corinthians 3:5-9)

What does this mean for us as we set about working the Lord's harvest and at the same time watching the Church decline around us? Let this remind us that we should not excuse our laziness or inattentiveness to spreading the Gospel, since we have a clear command to be about the work of the kingdom and to pray for its increase. At the same time, we aren't responsible for the results, those we leave in God's hands.

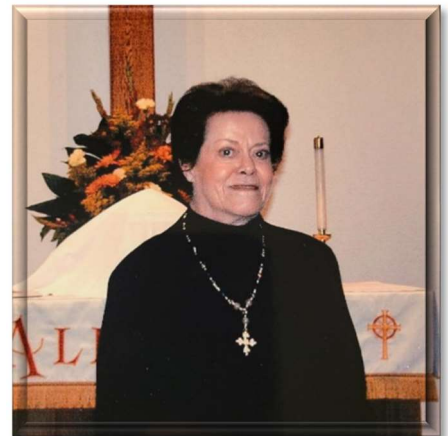
PrS



Peggy Stagliano

On September 23rd, I lost a friend. Many of you probably did not know Peggy Stagliano, as she was not active in social events at church. She liked to arrive early for the 8:00 service and leave early, just after communion. She once told me she did this to avoid crowds –not that she didn't like people, but she had balance issues and wasn't strong on her feet and didn't want to get knocked over. (Some of you may recall that she had some undiagnosed condition similar to Parkinson's which caused her to shake.)

Despite not being involved with social events at Lord of Life, I got to know her quite well. Because she was always at church early, I would often talk with her before the service. Then, the last three years or so, she was homebound and I would visit her regularly. Years ago she also asked me to visit her husband Vince who was confined to a memory care facility due to Alzheimer's. I did this for a few years and got to know Peggy even better throughout.



The above picture is about 20 years old and was taken when Peggy joined Lord of Life.

Peggy and her husband were blessed financially and she, in turn, was a blessing to many others. For example, because of a generous gift, she is directly responsible for my daughter being a harpist. She did not simply buy her a harp, but she did make it possible for us to buy it if we were committed. We were, and it has been an amazing blessing for my daughter and for a lot of people. Many others have similar stories of how Peggy (and Vince) blessed them with a generous gift or helped them when they were in need. I got to hear a few of these stories when talking with friends and family at her funeral.

A few nights before she died, she requested I come to her bedside at the hospital. We spent a few hours, from 11:00 pm to about 1:00 am praying, reading Scripture, and leaving her with a final blessing. She passed peacefully with loved ones beside her nearly the whole time.

Peggy and I talked about death often. She was not afraid at all and was ready whenever the Lord called her. She had a deep faith and firm trust that everything was in the Lord's hands and would turn out alright. Indeed it is and it will when He comes again in glory. Until then, *Requiescat in Pacem*.

prepare for worship in october

October 1: Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Texts: Ezek. 18:1-4, 25-32; Phil. 2:1-4 (5-13) 14-18;
Matt. 21:23-27 (28-32)

Hymn of the Day: "Lord, Help Us Walk Your Servant
Way," 857

October 8: Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Texts: Is. 5:1-7; Phil. 3:4b-14; Matt. 21:33-46

Hymn of the Day: "O Love, How Deep," 544

October 15: Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Texts Is. 25:6-9; Phil. 4:4-13; Matt. 22:1-14

Hymn of the Day: "A Multitude Comes from the East
and the West," 510

October 22: Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

Texts Is. 45:1-7; 1 Thess. 1:1-10; Matt. 22:15-22

Hymn of the Day: "Hoy God, We Praise Thy Name,"
940

October 29: Reformation Day (One Service 10AM)

Texts: Rev. 14:6-7; Rom. 3:19-28; John 8:31-36 or
Matt. 11:12-19

Hymn of the Day: "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,"
657



Coffee with Skeptics



Last summer at Higher Things, I met Erick Sorensen a former Lutheran pastor who works for an organization called 1517. He gave an excellent presentation called *Coffee with Skeptics*. This was not long after our congregation did the CADD survey which found that Lord of Life needed to improve on evangelism and outreach, so after hearing the presentation I told Erick it would be great to have that presentation at our church. Well, that's exactly what he is planning to do on **November 5th at 5:00 pm.**

Below is the description of the event and here is a link if you want to know more about Erick and the work he does.

<https://www.1517.org/contributors/erick-sorensen>

Coffee With Skeptics - Learn how to begin conversations with skeptics and unbelievers, what tactics we can use to share our faith, and ultimately how to comfort those who are lost with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Erick Sorensen is host of the Law & Gospel Devotional, co-host of the 30 Minutes in the New Testament and Field Guide to the Bible podcasts and is co-author of Scandalous Stories: A Sort of Commentary on the Parables.

Light snacks and refreshments will be provided.

October is Pastor Appreciation Month

This is a time set aside each year to honor and give thanks for our pastor who gives, cares, and serves us in remarkable ways. St. Paul urged Christian communities to acknowledge those “who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you,” holding these spiritual leaders “in the highest regard in love because of their work” (1 Thessalonians 5:12 – 13). Please consider taking time this month to show Pastor Shaltanis that we appreciate not only what he does, but also who he is to us and so many others



As Pastor diligently and faithfully keeps us in prayer, let us also do the same for him.

God bless,
Charles Hacker
Lord of Life Administrative Council President

A Prayer for our Pastor

Dear God, we pray for our pastor to be encouraged. We ask that you would minister to him and give him a deeper sense of hope. Send laborers into his life to extend needed help, support, and friendship. We pray that he and his family would be protected and covered by the precious blood of Jesus.

We pray, Lord, that our pastor would not be discouraged, or afraid, or grow weary. But instead that you would uplift his spirit, encourage him in trials, and recharge him when he is feeling overwhelmed. We ask that you would help him to put his hope in you and that you would in return renew his strength (Isaiah 40:31). We thank you for our pastor, Lord, and all the work he does for your kingdom.

We pray for our pastor to have motivation and vision, that ministries would continue to launch and thrive, and that he not lose one opportunity to serve and minister. We ask that you would help our pastor have a greater reach and that our church would be a beacon of light and hope throughout the world.

We pray that Pastor's faith would increase and that he would be drawn closer to you, Lord. We pray for our pastor to be on guard, to stand firm in the faith, to be courageous, and to be strong (1 Corinthians 16:13). May you, oh God, satisfy his thirst for you and fill him up so that he is ready at all times to do the good work you have called him to.

We pray over our pastor, Lord, that you would help him to lead with courage and strength. Send volunteers to lead alongside him, that he would not carry the weight alone. Help them all to be leaders marked by humility, compassion, and wisdom.

*We thank you for our pastor and pray for your blessings and protection on him and his family.
Amen.*



Come enjoy a delicious potluck lunch and celebrate the Reformation. An Oktoberfest potluck will be hosted by Family Ministry in celebration of Reformation Day on Sunday, October 29. Only one service will be held at 10:00 a.m. The potluck will immediately follow the service.

Brats, hotdogs, and beverages will be provided by the church. Attendees are invited to bring a favorite side dish or dessert, including but not limited to, German potato salad, Sauerkraut, Red Cabbage, Green Bean Casserole, Spätzle, Cucumber Salad, Rye Bread, Apple Pie, Cherry Pie, German Chocolate and/or Black Forest Cake, etc.

Please contact Gail Senter at 972-672-5769 or at gail.senter@yahoo.com if you have any questions.

Lord of Life Small Groups

EPIC PARENTING

- † For 30ish couples with kids
- † For info contact Ben Scarth
BenjaminScarth@yahoo.com
- † Usually meet one Sunday a month in the afternoon or evening

FRUITS OF THE VINE CARE GROUP

- † For info contact Scott Peters at 972-898-3351 cell or speters@planolutheran.com
- † Usually meet one Sun. a month at 5:30 PM

GOOD NEWS CARE GROUP

- † For info contact Mike Kunschke at (847) 951-6974
- † Will meet Sat., October 14 at 6:30 PM for Bible study

COLLEGE GROUP

- † For students in college or recent grads
- † For info contact Pastor Shaltanis at
PastorShaltanis@yahoo.com
- † Usually meet after the late service for lunch and Bible study



Lutheran World Relief
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. LASTING PROMISE.
Personal Care Kits

Lord of Life will be assembling kits on November 4th to ship out on November 11th. These kits give people around the world tools to stay healthy in life's most challenging situations. Please sign up to contribute the items needed for the kits and leave them in the LWR collection box in the narthex by October 29th.

The kits include:

- (1) light or medium weight bath-size towel (between 20" x 40" and 27" x 52") dark color recommended,
- (2or3) bath-size bars of soap equaling 8 to 9 oz in original wrapping,
- (1) adult size toothbrush,
- (1) sturdy comb,
- (1) pair of metal nail clippers.



Cash donations are also needed to cover shipping costs. (Make checks payable to LOL, note for LWR shipping)



OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

- 1 Mark & Kathy Plagens (46)
- 3 Frank Edelmann
- 3 Curtis Peters
- 6 Norma Martin
- 6 Gary Nuschler
- 6 Bennie & Paula Lowery (16)
- 7 Georgianna Womak
- 9 Susan Gromatzky
- 10 Rose Moore
- 10 Emory Smith
- 10 Craig Stevens
- 11 Tim Ozlowski
- 13 Alex Ozlowski
- 14 Travis & Elisabeth Bennett (6)
- 15 Margaret Duff
- 16 Adam Buckmeier
- 22 Sal & Julz Cruz (12)
- 23 Janet Sanders
- 23 Don & Paula Bunker (9)
- 24 Mike & Sherri Kunschke (36)
- 25 Daniel Kim
- 31 Ruth Bernhardt
- 31 Jonah Carter
- 31 Judie Dibbern
- 31 Daniel Ozlowski



Lord of Life Lutheran Church

Summarized Statement of Activity

6 Months Ending August 31, 2023

	Y-T-D Operating Funds	Y-T-D Budget	Variance	Jan-Dec 2023 Budget
Contributions				
Regular Offerings	\$382,301	\$375,540	\$6,761	\$580,202
Other	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Income	\$382,301	\$375,540	\$6,761	\$580,202
Expenses				
Benevolences	\$26,639	\$26,287	\$352	\$40,614
Elders	\$255,735	\$257,536	(\$1,801)	\$411,841
Education	\$35	\$600	(\$565)	\$1,000
Outreach	\$76	\$350	(\$274)	\$600
Office Expenses	\$8,747	\$7,710	\$1,037	\$12,090
Utilities	\$26,046	\$20,030	\$6,016	\$37,185
Property Maintenance	\$24,486	\$19,910	\$4,576	\$37,740
Stewardship	\$0	\$350	(\$350)	\$350
Family Ministries	\$1,021	\$3,490	(\$2,469)	\$5,290
Youth Board	\$5,096	\$5,200	(\$104)	\$6,600
Children's Ministry	\$2,492	\$4,500	(\$2,008)	\$6,000
Admin Council	\$1,325	\$1,700	(\$375)	\$2,600
Total Operating Expense	\$351,700	\$347,663	\$4,037	\$561,910
Extraordinary Expense	\$2,435			
Mortgage Payment	\$12,036	\$20,640	(\$8,604)	\$18,876
Total Expenses	\$366,171	\$368,303	(\$4,567)	\$580,786
Surplus or (Deficit)	\$16,130	\$7,237	\$11,328	(\$584)
Other Information:				
Operating Fund Balance	\$147,269			
Restricted Funds Balance	\$125,668			