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“... I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 16:18b

Our world is rapidly changing and moving away from the Christian faith. Fewer people are interested in attending church or even talking about God. They do not think in terms of being a created child of God and living according to His purpose and design.

We have been exploring a number of themes related to this in our Sunday morning study on Christopher Esget's book, *Disordered: Lies about Human Nature and the Truth that Sets Us Free*. As always, I encourage you to attend and join the discussion. You don't have to read the book in order to participate, and even if you just drop in, you will certainly learn as we look to what God's Word says about a number of cultural issues today.

I have also been thinking a lot about how these huge changes in our culture are effecting the Christian Church in America, our Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and Lord of Life in Plano. A number of studies have been published recently all trying to figure out why so many people are abandoning the Church and just how widespread this problem is. The results are sobering.

One such study is Ryan P. Burges' book, *The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, and Where They Are Going*. Burges is a pastor in the American Baptist Church as well as a professor of political science. His book provides careful answers to the question of why so many people today identify as *Nones* or people of no religion. He shows that not all *Nones* are the same. Some are hardened atheists, but most just claim "nothing in particular" when it comes to religion. *Nones* can be found in every generation, but their numbers increase among the younger generations, with something like 40-50% of *Nones* being under the age of 35.

Nones leave the Church for a variety of reasons. Some think that the rise of the *Nones* has to do with an increasingly secular culture. Whereas once it was very common for people to attend church and speak openly about religion at work and in school, that has all changed. Now we are told religion is divisive, and so we must be quiet about it and it is not welcome in the public square. Others point to politics as a significant contributing factor. The idea here is that the polarization is such that we do not simply disagree with those on the other side of the aisle, but we think they are awful and want nothing to do with them.

Christian Evangelicals in particular have gotten into politics and supporting candidates and certain political issues with the result that the people who oppose those candidates and issues, also oppose and reject their church. Still others speculate that the main reason for the change in society has to do with how the internet has changed people's access to information. Militant atheists have sought converts online, while previously ideas hostile to Christianity were not so readily found among coworkers or classmates. The internet has also led to more people being isolated, spending much of their free time in front of a screen with virtual friends and not being a part of a physical community (like a congregation.) Some think the reasons have to do with a loss of trust in social institutions generally, and many point to vast changes in family structures (children born out of wedlock, increase in divorce and single parenting, etc.) and the instability this has created. (Burges pgs. 33-70)

All of these reasons and more have resulted in a startling trend, "Membership has dropped by roughly a third across all religious traditions over the last twenty five years." This reported in *The Great Dechurching*, by Jim Davis and Michael Graham, which is another book on this topic just published last month. They also claim that about 15% of American adults living today (around 40 million people) have effectively stopped going to church.

I could go on to report more bad news about church statistics in American today and show how this has and likely will affect our own synod, but I will spare you the details. If you are interested in this, you can check out a very comprehensive study done on the LCMS here: <https://www.lutheranlifesurvey.church/> Suffice it to say, we are not immune from this problem affecting all churches in America today and every indication is that we will shrink dramatically in the coming years.

So what are we to do about this? Below are some suggestions, but these are by no means all there is to say about this. In fact, I raise this topic in the hope that together we can find more answers and ways to faithfully address these changes.

1. Change our perspective and do not get discouraged. Jesus' promise is still true: the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church. Though things change, and the number of Christians and churches may rise or fall, we aren't going away. Just as there was always a faithful remnant throughout Israel, we who are in the church today should see ourselves as the faithful remnant. Now more than ever, we need to also see ourselves as citizens of the heavenly kingdom and strangers and aliens in this fallen world. Though this way of thinking may be new for us who grew up in a time and place where almost everyone went to church and called themselves a Christian, this is nothing new for Christians whose citizenship is in heaven. [See Philippians 3:17-21]
2. Pray for revival! This we do as often as we pray "thy Kingdom come." This petition expresses the hope that the Lord would gather more to Himself by pouring out the Holy Spirit and changing the hearts of those who turn from Him. Ultimately God is the one who changes hearts and leads to repentance and faith. He alone gathers His sheep into the fold. That being said, God also gave us work to do in sharing the Good news...
3. Increase our outreach efforts –personally and as a congregation. Too often we have neglected our duty to go and tell the Good News, to make disciples, and bring up the next generation. We have waited for Lutherans to move in and simply hoped they would join our church. Likewise, we have hoped that as long as we took our children and grandchildren to church on Sunday and Confirmation classes when they were in 8th grade, everything would turn out okay. Instead, we

need to be proactive in talking to the lost and more involved in the spiritual formation of our children. We need to be able to speak about our faith clearly in our homes and away from home, knowing what we believe and why we believe it. We also need to be able to defend it against attacks from the outside and help our children to do so as well.

4. Be aware of what's happening and plan accordingly. These changes have already and will affect us as a congregation. Given that, we need to be even more responsible with our resources of time and money. We need ever more faithful stewardship given the shrinking numbers we are likely to have in the future.

What other things do you suggest we can do as individuals and as a congregation in the face of these major changes in the number of people identifying as Christians today?

PrS

Michael Paradise III

Like everyone else, I was completely shocked in January when I heard the news that Michael had been diagnosed with a severe brain tumor. I was unfamiliar with the term *glioblastoma*, but now I understand it is a death sentence. Fortunately, it only affects around 3 per 100,000 people; unfortunately, Michael was one of them.

Michael made the best of this diagnosis. He stayed positive and was committed to going through surgery, chemo, radiation, and everything else. He had heard that while the average life expectancy with a glioblastoma is something like 18 months, there were others who went on to live for 5 years. He was hoping for more years. He wanted to marry his girlfriend, Lacey. He had reached the top of his career in restaurant management and hoped to keep working. Alas, it was not to be. Michael had surgery in January which seemed to go well. He followed that up with chemo and radiation treatments, but as the weeks went by, he lost a lot of strength. He had trouble standing up and then walking. He spent the last month or so in a rehabilitation hospital and then hospice care. In January, when he was first diagnosed, he was told that if he did not have surgery, he could only hope for six more months. Michael went through surgery and all the rest, and was still only given six more months. He died on July 22nd at the age of 55.

It was a long six months and they were very difficult for Michael's loved ones, especially his parents Mike and Sandy, and his girlfriend Lacey. They were by his side constantly helping him and serving him. They truly loved him until the end. We had a nice memorial service for Michael on August 30th. Lots of folks showed up and thanked God for Michael and for what Christ has done for Michael and for all.

In his final months, Michael lost so much, and yet one thing he never lost was his faith in Jesus. Michael liked to joke around and laugh a lot, but when it came time to say prayers, read the Scriptures, and receive the sacrament, he was very serious. He knew he was listening and talking to the God he would soon meet. He was ready for the meeting, because he had known Christ his whole life and trusted Him. His life ended way too soon, but it ended with faith in Jesus. On account of that, I look forward to seeing him again one day in the Kingdom.



The Board of Outreach needs your help. We are looking for more volunteers to serve on the Board of Outreach to help plan and work at future events. We also need people with webpage or social media skills, experience with promotions and event coordination, and we also want people with a fun, outgoing personality who enjoy meeting new people and are not shy about inviting people to church or talking about our Lord and the Christian faith in general. If you are interested in serving, please email Pastor Shaltanis

Lord of Life Lutheran Church Annual Men's Retreat

Location:

Camp All Saints
418 Stanton Way, Pottsboro, TX 75076
Website: <https://www.campallsaints.com/>

Cost: \$95

Start Date/Time:

Friday October 13, 2023
5:00 PM – 7:00 PM (*you can arrive earlier if you like, but not expected*)
If you are going to be later than 7:00 PM, please call Ben and let him know.

End Date/Time:

Saturday October 14, 2023
After Lunch (3:00 PM is the official late departure time)

Schedule:

- Friday Steak Dinner: 7:00 PM (*camp dining hall*)
 - Bible Study
 - Free time (*possible campfire*)
- Saturday Breakfast: 8:00 AM (*camp dining hall*)
 - Bible Study
 - Free time (*fishing, hiking, napping, shootin the bull...*)
 - Saturday Lunch: 12:00 PM (*camp dining hall*)
 - Go Home

What is Provided:

- Meals
- Lodging (*dormitory style cabins with bunks and showers*)

Items to Bring:

- Bible or bible app
- Personal items (clothing, toiletries, shower towel)
- Snacks, beverages, including adult beverages and tobacco products
- Flashlight
- Bed linens, pillow, or sleeping bag (*the camp no longer provides linens*)
- Camp Chair (*optional*)

- Fishing gear/bait (*optional*)
- Hiking boots (*optional*)

The festivities and activities do not officially start until dinner time on Friday.

You are welcome to arrive early to the camp to relax, explore, or maybe do a little fishing.

For additional questions contact Ben Scarth 817-521-6516.



prepare for worship in september

September 3: Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Texts: Jer. 15:15-21; Rom. 12:9-21; Matt. 16:21-28
Hymn of the Day: "Hail, Thou Once Despised Jesus," 531

September 10: Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Texts: Ezek. 33:7-9; Rom. 13:1-10; Matt. 18:1-20
Hymn of the Day: "My Soul, Now Praise Your Maker," 820

September 17: Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Texts Gen. 50:15-21; Rom. 14:1-12; Matt. 18:21-35
Hymn of the Day: "Come Down, O Love Divine," 501

September 24: Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Texts: Is. 55:6-9; Phil. 1:12-14, 19-30; Matt. 20:1-16
Hymn of the Day: "Hark, the Voice of Jesus Calling," 827

Lord of Life Scholarship Fund

Years ago, our congregation built up a significant balance in the scholarship fund, and, over the last half dozen or more years, the Elders have awarded scholarships to a number of the children of our church who have studied at Lutheran schools.

Thanks be to God, we have additional students who are currently pursuing their education at Lutheran institutions and others who will likely do so in the future. However, the current balance in the scholarship fund is likely to be insufficient to allow us to assist all of the students who would be eligible in the coming years.

Therefore, now that our congregation's debt has been retired, the Elders would like to encourage our members to help replenish the scholarship fund through regular giving toward that fund in addition to what we would otherwise give to the general fund. While the importance of supporting Lutheran education through such scholarships is likely obvious, our perspective on this is detailed as follows.



Scholarship Fund

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.
Proverbs 22:6

As Christian parents, we strive to do exactly as this proverb instructs when we teach our faith to our children. We desire to keep the promises that we and your children's sponsors (Godparents) spoke on their behalf at their baptisms. That is, we want our children to grow up to be faithful Christians in addition to becoming well-adjusted adults. We know that there are forces working against us in this; forces seeking to compromise our faith and destroy the faith of our children. In recent years, those forces seem to have found a home in public schools and universities.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
Ephesians 6:12

We also know that those who seek to undermine the faith of our children in this way will be judged by God.

"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."
Matthew 18:5-6

Until that judgment comes, some of our parents and students will make the decision to pursue a Lutheran education - one where faith in God is supported and encouraged even as other topics are taught. Since such decisions come with financial implications, we feel that whatever our congregation can do to support such decisions with scholarships is important work in building and supporting the Kingdom of God.

If you are moved by this and wish to support the replenishment of our scholarship fund for the coming years, you will find a supply of scholarship fund offering envelopes in the Narthex which may be used for these offerings in addition to your general fund offerings.

God bless,
Mike Kunschke
Board of Elders

Teen Times

By now I would anticipate that everyone is back in the routine at school and that fall activities are filling up the family calendars. You might have officially said so long to summer over the Labor Day holiday weekend with one last family trip out of town, having fun with your friends, or just relaxing at home around a pool. However you spent your time, I hope it was enjoyable. At the end of July, the Sr. IMPACT youth spent a week in San Antonio and Corpus Christi at the Higher Things youth conference and a few days on the beach. During that time, the youth from Lord of Life and Immanuel Lutheran in Fairview were able to connect with each other and rekindle friendships. If you read the Teen Times article from August about Higher Things and the reflections from the youth, you can tell that the two youth groups have formed a special bond. As a result, the youth leaders from Lord of Life and Immanuel got to spend some time together and brainstorm ideas of how to keep our youth groups connected for the rest of this year and into 2024. I am excited to share some of the activities that are planned to keep the friendship momentum going between our two church youth groups. The following are events, dates, and times we are looking forward to. Some details will be forthcoming:

Sunday, September 17; Fowling in East Plano, 5-8pm

Friday night and Saturday, October 6-7; Sr. High retreat at Lake Tawakoni

Sunday, November 12; Escape Room at Breakout Games Dallas (Plano location) Time to be determined

Sunday, December 17; Youth Christmas caroling and Christmas party, 1:00pm - 5:00pm (tentative)

January 2024; suggested event – progressive dinner, date and time to be determined

February, 2024; ReThink Apologetics Conference

It is a real blessing that we can spend time and partner with sister congregations to help keep our youth engaged in the church and with each other. As mentioned before, your fall calendars are probably filling up quickly, so be sure to add these youth events to it and stay tuned for more details. Until next time, I extend best wishes and God's blessings on your new school year and family events this fall.

Scott Peters



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., August 12 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)



SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

- 1 Devrie Hahn
- 2 Bill Bennett
- 2 Candace Klein
- 2 Fred & Ruth Bernhardt (56)
- 3 Gail Senter
- 6 Dave & Dee Peters (59)
- 8 Kelsey Crumrine
- 9 Mary Ravitz
- 9 Mike & Monique Phelan (13)
- 12 Carrie Ziegelbein
- 13 Charlotte Reeves
- 16 Wyatt Horsefield
- 16 Sarah Kim
- 16 Andrew Short
- 18 Ernie & Susan Gromatzky (52)
- 19 Christian Klein
- 21 Angie Buckmeier
- 21 Mike Scaglione
- 22 Mike Kunschke
- 23 Nora Parrent
- 26 Mirien Senter
- 27 Jerry Parish
- 28 James Kade
- 29 Carl Carper
- 30 Beverly Moudy

Lord of Life Lutheran Church
Summarized Statement of Activity
6 Months Ending June 30, 2023

	Y-T-D Operating Funds	Y-T-D Budget	Variance	Jan-Dec 2023 Budget
Contributions				
Regular Offerings	\$334,052	\$335,434	(\$1,382)	\$580,202
Other	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Income	\$334,052	\$335,434	(\$1,382)	\$580,202
Expenses				
Benevolences	\$23,261	\$23,480	(\$219)	\$40,614
Elders	\$230,732	\$225,344	\$5,388	\$411,841
Education	\$0	\$550	(\$550)	\$1,000
Outreach	\$76	\$350	(\$274)	\$600
Office Expenses	\$7,627	\$7,015	\$612	\$12,090
Utilities	\$18,650	\$20,030	(\$1,380)	\$37,185
Property Maintenance	\$23,452	\$18,640	\$4,812	\$37,740
Stewardship	\$0	\$350	(\$350)	\$350
Family Ministries	\$829	\$3,370	(\$2,541)	\$5,290
Youth Board	\$4,873	\$5,100	(\$227)	\$6,600
Children's Ministry	\$2,050	\$4,000	(\$1,950)	\$6,000
Admin Council	\$1,174	\$1,500	(\$326)	\$2,600
Total Operating Expense	\$312,724	\$309,729	\$2,995	\$561,910
Extraordinary Expense	\$2,435	\$0	\$2,435	\$0
Mortgage Payment	\$12,036	\$18,060	(\$6,024)	\$18,876
Total Expenses	\$327,195	\$327,789	(\$594)	\$580,786
Surplus or (Deficit)				
	\$6,857	\$7,645	\$1,647	(\$584)
Other Information:				
Operating Fund Balance	\$129,065			
Restricted Funds Balance	\$135,221			