



Celebrating Faith and the Nation's 250th Anniversary

By: Bruce Pokarney

On this Fourth of July, the United States of America observes the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

“Celebrate with gratitude. Remember with honesty. Serve with humility. Renew with hope.”

Those profound words summarize the thoughts of Kent Hansen—former history teacher and current assistant principal at Aberdeen Central High School, and active member of the Bethlehem community. Kent’s personal viewpoint during this special occasion is a mixture of pride and realism regarding the “American Experiment,” a way to describe our nation’s founding and ongoing evolution as a constitutional democracy as imagined by the founding fathers. And there is no doubt that faith and Christianity have played a central role in the life of the United States.



“The thing we should focus on today—and what I think the founding fathers would focus on—is the intent and hope that comes with the Declaration of Independence,” Kent says. “I think our faith functions much the same way every day in church. We talk about how we are flawed, how we all have our shortcomings, but that our intent is to always try to be better. It’s laid out clearly in the US constitution that the goal is to create a more perfect union.”

Kent Hansen’s faith today has been enriched by Bethlehem’s ministries. Born and raised in a small town in northern Montana, Kent graduated from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, looking for his first teaching job. He found it



at Simmons Middle School in Aberdeen. Nearly 20 years of teaching and coaching have led him to school administration. Kent's wife, Jenna, is currently a vocal director at Simmons, and the couple have two sons—Elliott, who is 12, and Emmett, who is 7. When Elliott was born, the Hansens found the church where they wanted him baptized—Bethlehem.

“I want my boys to see that the church is not just the pastor in charge— the church is a body that requires contributions from all of us,” says Kent.

“If we have certain skills, then we should be using

them. I feel I'm a pretty good communicator and I can connect with kids as well as other people. We have members who have skills in technology and music, or other areas. I want my boys to see I'm involved from a place of faith and accountability—not trying to be more than I am, but recognizing I can contribute to the church.”

Kent has been a Sunday school teacher and a member of the Call Committee as part of his active involvement in Bethlehem's ministries.

Kent's views on the 250th anniversary are largely shaped by the experiences of his life. But he recognizes that a country as big and diverse as the United States will reflect many ways of celebrating the nation's milestone.

“The way you view our country is connected to your circumstances. If you live in a city or in rural America, if you are part of agriculture or in the service industries, if you've been in the military, if you are Native American or African-American—it's going to impact the way you view our country and our history.”

Kent says one way to help celebrate the 250th is to read more about our nation's history, maybe finding a good historical narrative that's a bit different than what you might normally read. He also thinks it's absolutely appropriate to be proud of our country while recognizing it is imperfect and still a work in progress.

“The challenge that some of us have is the same we have as parents. We can be proud of our kids without being arrogant or without believing that they don't have flaws. I love my children but recognize that they aren't perfect.”

Kent Hansen points to the Beatitudes in the Bible (Matthew 5:3-12) as a way to approach the celebration of our country's anniversary. Attitudes and virtues that include humility, mercy, and justice go a long way to achieve the intent of our nation's founding fathers.

Thank you for being a vital part of Bethlehem and for your support. With your partnership and the power of the Holy Spirit, Bethlehem is touching lives each and every day – connecting us with God, one another, and our mission in the world.



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