



April 2020
Quarterly Magazine

The Communicator

A Conference on “Re-Igniting” the Church

By Jane Henkel, Nativity Financial Secretary

Evelyn Galli, NLC Treasurer, and I experienced the joy of attending a recent ELCA conference “Ignite the Church” in Orlando. We met, worshipped, prayed and networked with many of the 125 pastors and lay leaders in attendance from 25 states. We attended daily seminars presented by pastoral instructors who gave us as Council members new ways of looking at many of Nativity’s challenges.

We went with open minds to learn and share what Nativity is experiencing. What we found at the conference was that we, like 80-85% of other U.S. denominational churches, are having similar plateauing and declines in worship attendance and stewardship. What the conference did was to present us with inspirational ideas and transformative thinking with ‘out-of-the-box’ ideas and demonstrations.

One of the most exciting examples of non-traditional thinking was in a field trip we took to see and experience the Castle Church Brewing Community.

This enterprise was built as half church and half brewery in a warehouse building. It attracts all ages with its menu of locally brewed craft beers with the names of Means of Grace (brown ale) and Luther (lager IPL) in homage to the Reformation. Worship takes place informally while sitting on picnic tables with beers in hand. Castle Church’s success is a true example of responding to the needs of the surrounding community it serves. Its pastor looks to start other churches using this model. See its website castlechurchbrewingcommunity.com for inspiration.

If you are interested in more details or information about attending the next “Ignite the Church” in 2021, please see or email Evelyn evgalli@bcany.com or me, Jane Henkel jetgal55@gmail.com.



Now is a good time to keep our church family, staff and all those suffering in our prayers.



PASTOR'S PASSION

BY REV. GIUSEPPE MATTEI

A LENTEN JOURNEY

When Moses was ready, God engaged him from the burning bush with a vision and a mission. The vision was personal: *"I have observed the misery...I have heard the cry...I have come down to deliver them and bring them up to a land..."* Then God gave him a mandate: *"I will send you to Pharaoh."* (Exodus 3) *The people's journey of liberation through the desert was made "by stages"* (Exodus 17:1; Numbers 10:12) because God demands blind faith more than blind obedience. A journey by stage seems to be God's preferred plan (Genesis 12:9; 13:3).

The wilderness is a testing ground for Israel (Exodus 14-17 and 32-34) as it is for the Lord (Luke 4; Matthew 4) and we should think it is for us as well. My suggestion is to use the word "training" rather than "testing ground" for there we see God at work strengthening the faith-fiber of the people. The word "testing" implies that God is not sure about our faith and creates trick questions or fall traps to see how much we have learned. With "training" God observes how strong we are. That is why a modern version of the Lord's Prayer substitutes the petition "Lead us not into temptation" with "Save us from the time of trial".

Lent is traditionally a liturgically-led "training time" in the desert. The disciplines used are prayer, fasting, and

alms-giving, and they train us to identify and correct our compulsions and cravings in preparation to the victory of Easter resurrection. Training for new life is a process of shedding unnecessary spiritual and psychological weight, all the fears and false needs that encumber trust in and leaning on the Lord.

Nobody can describe the "desert" before it happens, hence a disciplined training in preparation to the trial. The coronavirus Covid19 has overwhelmed many a health system and has required dramatic and courageous steps to limit its life-threatening power. Where we find ourselves is another of those "stages" on our journey of faith. Not that God has *led* us here. But God *finds* us here. God is present and on our side in the trials of life. The faith responses we give are an opportunity for witnessing to our neighbors near and far. Keeping calm helps us both to breathe into our fears and to offer love responses.

The "stages" of Lent can be identified with Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday. On Easter morning the resurrection may or may not concur with our present emotional state but it is a promise and an assurance of what is ahead. So even in the desert our faith responses speak of the promised land.

AN ENCOUNTER WITH G(O)D

I believe in the goodness of humanity. I believe that there are good people everywhere. A recent experience confirmed this for me once again.

I was standing in the checkout line at Walgreens with a cart filled with 10 bottles of laundry detergent. It was a good price so I wanted to buy it to donate to our food pantry since most of those who come for help have food cards that don't allow them to buy toiletries and laundry supplies.

When I came to the cashier, she informed me that there was a limit of four bottles on the soap. I said, "I looked at the sign to see

if there was limit, but I saw nothing." The cashier called the manager over, who told me that she had the authority to limit the sales. I was about to put six bottles back when the woman in line behind me said, "I'll take four." I put four bottles in her cart and returned two to the shelf. After I had finished paying, I turned to the lady behind me and said, "Well, at least you're getting a good deal on detergent!"

She replied, "Oh, I'm buying these for you." I was dumbfounded. Such generosity from a stranger! She continued, "Even the homeless need to do laundry."

I believe in the goodness of people, people who are created in the image of God.

Carlan Helgeson



DEACON ORDINATION & INSTALLATION

BY LYN G. DERENSKI

Michelle Mehan-Conklin



Back row L-R: Clyde Rosten, Jack Page, Pastors Ann & Rick Malivuk Front row L-R: Deacon Aura Suarez (bishop's wife), Bishop Pedro Suarez, Michelle & Kim Mehan-Conklin, Pr. Mattei & Pr. Joy Waters (NLC Dean)

Michelle's ordination is as a Minister of the Word and Service and is now a rostered deacon of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

ELCA Diaconal Ministers hold a theological master's degree and training or degree work in a professionally focused area. Diaconal ministers serve under call through agencies, institutions, synod councils, and traditional church programs as they build bridges between the church and the world. Currently, Michelle is serving as a Palliative (comforting) Care Chaplain at North Bay Hospital part of the BayCare Health System.

ELCA Parish Deacon. A number of ELCA synods such as Metro New York, Upper New York, Metro Chicago and Florida-Bahamas of which Nativity Lutheran is a member, have established a synodical parish deacon program. In most cases, synodical deacons are trained through a two-year program of study. After program completion, participants are considered for certification by synod leadership and are

Charlotte Downing



L-R: Clyde Rosten, Charlotte Downing, Pr. Mattei, Ruth Ann Hoy, Michelle Mehan-Conklin, Jack Page not pictured.

installed in their congregation where they will serve. The deacons engage in particular tasks under supervision and in partnership with their congregations pastor. Most of these deacons serve as volunteers.

Typically, the deacon's term of service coincides with that of the congregation's pastor. In some synods, deacons may also serve on behalf of synod leadership at the conference or at synodical level, primarily engaged in administration and non-sacramental ministry.

Clyde Rosten, Jack Page, Charlotte Downing and Ruth Ann Hoy all serve as volunteer congregation deacons. Ruth Ann is studying to become an ELCA Diaconal Minister. Upon completion of her studies and acceptance by the ELCA, she will be ordained as a Minister of the Word and Service and become a rostered deacon of the ELCA.

Please take the time to pray for and thank our deacons for their time and service.





Spiritual Life

By Linda Hengesh



Nursery



Members and visitors to Nativity Lutheran Church are greeted with many friendly faces on Sunday morning before and after service. One of those friendly faces can be found standing outside the vibrant and colorful nursery. Cindy Rogers is Nativity's faithful Nursery Attendant since June of 2017 and has been a member at Nativity for 13 years.



Cindy Rogers

The nursery is available during both Sunday services to care for children from birth through their 1st Communion. The room is a friendly and engaging space for children to stay while their parents take part in the worship service. The children are provided with age-appropriate toys and engaging activities to keep them happily busy. All children are treated with kindness and TLC.

Parents can feel confident with the care their child will receive in our nursery, as Cindy is CPR trained, has been vetted with a background check, and has an education background. Parents must sign their child in and out every Sunday and provide their cell number. Should any concern arise, parents can discreetly be contacted during the service. Parents are always welcome to stay with their children in the nursery if it makes them feel more comfortable. The entire Sunday Service is audio broadcast in the nursery.

The nursery provides outreach ministry to entire families and visitors to our church. Cindy strongly believes that families are the future of Nativity, and as a church we need to do all we can to welcome and embrace them, whether they choose to take advantage of the nursery or have their children with them in the sanctuary.



If you would like material on your ministry included in this publication, please submit your request to the Communication Committee.

Christian Education

By Susan Nordstrom



Adult Forum

Hernando County's Drug, Mental Health and Veterans Treatment Courts

The subject of Nativity's Adult Forum on January 19 was Hernando County's problem-solving courts for Adult Drug Court, Mental Health Court and Veterans Court. These photos were taken during the Forum. Spectrum Bay News 9 filmed and featured Nativity's Adult Forum and aired it that evening and the following morning on their channel. They focused on an interview with one of the two graduates who participated in the Forum.

In 1989, Miami-Dade County created the first drug court in the United States. These problem-solving courts are now nationwide. They utilize a team of justice system stakeholders including judges, case managers, prosecutors, defense attorneys, treatment professionals, law enforcement officers, and corrections personnel. Non-violent participants are offered an opportunity to clean up their lives in these programs. Requirements are stringent and include impromptu drug tests, individual and group counseling, and paying their court fees. Upon completion, participants' records are expunged of charges. The programs are examples of tough love.



Judge George Angeliadis
and Administrator Amy Baldwin

The Women of Nativity have been involved for several years in making the participants' graduations a celebration of their accomplishments. WON has given them handmade quilts and blankets, greeting cards, and cake for everyone in court that day. A Nativity representative publicly congratulates, thanks them and acknowledges the difficult road they have traveled to reach their graduation.

The Hernando County problem-solving courts project was Nativity's February Mission of the month. NLC's donations, along with a member's application for a Thrivent Action Team gift, raised \$525 for the problem-solving courts ministry. The ministry is grateful and is thankful to the NLC congregation.



Prayer for Christian Unity

BY PASTOR MATTEI

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Each year churches gather to pray together for the full unity which is Christ's will "*that all may be one,*" (John 17:21) as he and the Father are one during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. We pray that our actions and prayers embody the true peace, reconciliation, and unity which is to be found where God dwells. In 1966, the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Vatican Secretariat (now Council) for Promoting Christian Unity began collaborating as a common international text for worldwide usage.



This year, we are reminded of the importance and need for "unusual kindness" in the dialogue that leads to growth in unity. We do this in a world where separation and division hinder the quest for Christian Unity. As Paul recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, it was through their unusual kindness that a divided people were drawn closer together. (cf. Acts 27:18 – 28:10)

The theme and text for each year's observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity are chosen and prepared by representatives of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The preparatory work on the theme for this year's week of prayer material was undertaken by a group of representatives of different Christian communities in Malta.

Our local Christian Unity service was held on January 19 at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church on Deltona Blvd. Three other churches participated, Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Holy Trinity Orthodox Church and Nativity Lutheran Church. The ushers counted 125 people in attendance. The choirs from St. Andrew's and Nativity led the hymn offering.

The people who attended very much enjoyed the service and expressed a desire for it to be an annual event. Hopefully, more churches will participate next year.

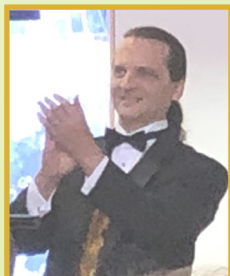




Hernando Harmonizers

BY LYN G. DERENSKI

“Be Our Guest” An Afternoon of Music



Chris Barthauer
Music Director

The concert was a great success with a wonderful afternoon of music and joy. The Hernando Harmonizers are an award-winning chorus and a local chapter of the international Barbershop Harmony Society. The members of men and women range in age from 12 to 91. The chorus and special groups—aptly named Pine Chords, Senior Moments, Now and Then and Chordspinners—perform throughout the Nature Coast. They also compete in district competitions and are ranked among the best choruses in the region.

The audience was treated to a range of memorable movie songs and what brought the audience to their feet was a series of patriotic favorites. These selections recognized all the branches of service and the sentiments of their loved ones at home.

The concert was an operating fundraiser for both the Harmonizers and Nativity Lutheran Church. The tickets were free but were needed to ensure adequate seating. Attendance was 220. The love offering of **\$1,363** was divided between the chorus and the church.

The chorus has been rehearsing at NLC since February 2004.

Thank you to the Harmonizers and NLC organizers!



Ron Hesketh
Assistant Director



Community Life

By Jane Henkel

NATIVITY GARDENS

The primary focus of the Garden Ministry is to keep the gardens at the entrance of the Nativity buildings welcoming. This entails watering, light weed pulling, keeping bird baths clean and taking care of the potted plants in the courtyard.

This ministry has been headed by Linda Wagner and Joan Berg since 2006 when Pastor Kris Wee asked them to be in charge. Before then, Mary Pollard ran this group.



Today's gardeners are Doug Johnson, Phil & Cheryl Wolfe, Ken & Carol White, Suzanne Chelf, Noel Prettyman, Jodie Fell, Alexis Peterson, Linda & Brian Wagner and Joan Berg.

This ministry is always looking for more participants. A weekly or bi-weekly commitment is all that it takes. Please sign up on the list in the Narthex for a time that works for you or contact Linda Wagner at bwagner21@tampabay.rr.com if interested.

Co-chair Joan Berg administers the group by making sign up sheets and guidelines for monthly gardening. These sign up sheets are posted in the Narthex and the guidelines are placed in gardeners' mailboxes. New gardeners are welcomed and instructed during their first session so that they will be comfortable working independently in the future.



**Linda & Brian Wagner, Suzanne Chelf,
Philip & Cheryl (not pictured) Wolfe**



OUTREACH

BY LYN G. DERENSKI

ANGEL TREE

Angel Tree is a prison fellowship program that gives parents behind bars a way to restore and strengthen relationships with their children through a tangible experience of God's love—especially at Christmas.

Here's how it works:



1. A mom or dad behind bars asks a Chaplain for help to give Christmas to their kids. Thousands of incarcerated parents are signing up their children right now.



2. Your donation will help deliver a gift and the Gospel to a child on behalf of their parent who is in prison.



3. Every single Angel Tree family will have the opportunity to receive a full-text Bible in English or Spanish.



4. Children come to know Christ, prisoners' hearts are opened to the Gospel, and families are restored!

Nativity Lutheran Church has been involved with the Angel Tree program for over 10 years beginning with Pat Yost, Lilo and Ernie Horeis and now with the current coordinator Linda Russo.

Angel Tree provides Linda with a list of children and she contacts their legal guardians to secure their approval for the child's participation. Additionally, the guardian ensures the gift of approximately \$25 is suitable or if a really needed item would be more appropriate.

The focus of the event is a special reading of Jesus' Christmas story. The event is a party with lunch, treats, games, Christmas songs, crafts, stockings filled with goodies and hygiene items.

Payton, Lilo, Ernie, Gina, Eileen, Susan

Jaxon, Cameron, Linda



Another NLC ministry, the Crafty Ladies, contributes small quilts for each child.

The goal is to bring Jesus and His love to children ages 1 to 16 through the absent parent, their caretakers and the Christian community of NLC.

Linda said in 2019 they purchased gifts for 31 children; 28 attended the celebration. Ernie Horeis delivered the gifts to the children unable to attend the Christmas celebration.

Linda asked that a very deep and heartfelt thanks go to the NLC congregation for making this celebration possible for children in this difficult circumstance.



CHURCH COUNCIL

by Lyn G. Derenski, Council Member-at-Large

Many may wonder, “Just what are the responsibilities of a Congregation Council?” The easy answer is “So many”. A more precise answer is, executing the business of the church. But what does that encompass? The scope covers both external and internal business. The following is a brief overview:

- Managing the fiscal responsibility of the church. This covers accounting for offerings and multiple donations to specific ministries by category, paying the staff, the mortgage, insurance, utilities, service contracts and unexpected repairs, etc.
- Establishing a budget and managing funds within the budget approved by the congregation and maintaining transparency to the congregation regarding the financial status of the church.
- Encouraging ministry activities and events by ensuring they comply with our values, vision, mission, Constitution, By-laws and Continuing Resolutions and our Policy and Procedure Guidebook. These documents help to make sure all ministries are treated fairly. This includes facility use, storage, resources and the calendar of events, just to name a few. When resources are

limited it falls to the Council to prioritize and guarantee that the focus is on our greater mission.

Examples of Major Projects:

Updating NLC Constitution, By-laws, and Policy and Procedure Guidebook. The ELCA has requirements for member congregations. The congregation can also institute changes to the Constitution and Bylaws. The Policy and Procedure Guidebook needs to be kept current, reflecting how we operate.

A Facilities Use Policy has been developed to cover the guidelines and fees for members, non-profit community groups, private individuals or business groups using one or more of the areas on NLC property. The Wedding and Funeral Policy were recently updated in the Policy and Procedure Guidebook.

Approve and support **Fundraisers and Outreach Events.** The Hernando Harmonizers concert is an example of a fund raiser. A Trunk or Treat proposal has been approved for Oct. 24, 2020, an Outreach Event.

These are just 3 of the numerous items the council is working on. The effort required can be very intense and requires many hours beyond the monthly meetings.

The Council wants to thank all our members for their support and prayers!



Kim Mehan-Conklin, Lyn Derenski, Karin Glessner, Council President Dan Derenski, Pastor Mattei, Jane Henkel, Ed Lewis, Jim Runyan, Evelyn Galli, Dennis Rogers, Carlan Helgeson (not pictured)

YOUTH

by Lorrie DeFrancesco

Assembling candles for
Christmas Eve service.



The youth meet
Thursday evenings
for devotional
and social time.
It is a time to
study, have fun
and spend
quality time
together.

Playing Doodle Dice



Learning how to play
The Logo Game.



Studying

#Truth by Josh McDowell a
365-day teen devotional.



Using recycled glass blocks to
make Christmas decorations.





Quilts

Thankoffering

Women of Nativity made beautiful quilts, prayer shawls and collected toys all to be distributed both locally and abroad. In addition \$1,130 was donated for the ELCA Women to further ministry work.

God's Blessings to all who used their time & talent.



Tim Cotter
Marty Salzbach



Spaghetti
Dinner



SPAGHETTI DINNER & TRIVIA

February Fellowship was
food and fun!

There were 75 who enjoyed dinner, followed by mixing up the dinner groups for trivia.

Pat Runyan lead the table teams in a game of "Are you smarter than a 50 year old?"



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The Communicator

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Evelyn Galli, Jane Henkel,
Susan Nordstrom,
Linda Hengesh
and Guests



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America

God's work. Our hands.