PASTOR WEE'S LETTER TO THE CONGREGATION CONTINUES

Lent, Jesus Christ Superstar, Holy Week, and Easter.

I continue to be astonished at the energy, creativity, and giftedness of Advent staff and congregation. The Portraits of Discipleship on Lent Wednesdays, from Trish Pipken's painting to the 12 disciples and Jesus, along with the gorgeous music of Holden Evening Prayer, made an unforgettable series. Wasn't it great?! We had upwards of 400 people at midweek worship services!

And then came Jesus Christ Superstar What an amazing production, involving 80 voices from Advent and around the community, whole families singing together, and some 1500 people in attendance, probably more than half of them from outside the congregation. This event was both a great means of reaching out to neighbors and a challenging and memorable entry into Holy Week.

Then followed our services on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil (Sat. eve), and the Easter Festival services. Each was extraordinary. Many thanks for the extra efforts of our musicians, some of whom were in Superstar AND the four services above.

Protecting our children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation.

It seems as if every day brings more news about priests abusing children. Some 20 years ago, this was a big subject in the U.S., and there were revelations of abusive behavior by clergy of many denominations, including Lutheran. At that time, ELCA leadership became very proactive. If allegations were admitted or proven, pastors were immediately removed from their jobs and from the clergy roster (that is, "defrocked"). All pastors and program staff were required to attend training sessions on "maintaining appropriate boundaries," especially sexual boundaries.

What have we done at Advent? Advent's pastors, Youth Director J. C. Lippold, and Children's Ministry and Confirmation Director Rachel Arends have all received such training. We do background checks on all adults who work with young people—Church School teachers, Confirmation mentors and guides, Cell Group leaders, choir directors. Then we provide a training session for these people, with an emphasis on appropriate boundaries. Late last fall, the Council committed to a program called "Cherish God's Children," the goal of which is to protect young people from sexual exploitation, at Advent and wherever they go in the community. This program includes prayers for all our people, education, advocacy, and partnership with Families Moving Forward, which works with vulnerable young people. Watch for the prayer opportunities that will begin next fall.

Completion of Grace Hall!

It's been seven years or more in the making—mostly raising the necessary funds—but Grace Hall will be complete by the time you read this, or very nearly so. Isn't it beautiful? Many thanks are due to Property Manager Karen Coddington, the Property Committee, and the many volunteers who have been working in there much of this school year. Soon we will dedicate the room to the Glory of God and to the service of Advent's mission. We have only begun to imagine the uses for this room, in building fellowship and serving the wider community. Pray about the new ministries that will come because of Grace Hall—and be a part of them!

Our new Administrative Assistant

Ann Dedman joined our staff on April 13, after Bev Kiheri left for another job in December and Sue Barry-Hagen filled in admirably (through both Christmas and Easter!). Ann is very talented and experienced in church office work. Stop by and get acquainted with her. She will be working Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. She and her husband are members of Cross of Glory Lutheran Church in Brooklyn Center.

Advent's Financial Situation

The current recession has cost a number of our members their jobs, and others are taking cuts and needing to be careful with expenses. So, in spite of the great enthusiasm for the mission of Advent that you can feel whenever you come here, we are not receiving enough offerings to maintain our ministries through the year. Each week our giving is slightly less than last year or the year before, and this shortfall has been consistent since January. We managed to finish last year in the black, but this year we may soon be sinking into red ink (actually, as of Easter our income for the year has been $18 more than expenses, but normally at this time of year we would want to be $20,000 **ahead** of expenses, because historically we receive less offering in the summer.

Advent has no extra "slush fund" to draw on. If we do not improve our offerings in the weeks ahead, we will not be able to meet our commitments or carry forward Advent's mission. You don't want this to happen, and neither do I. What can we do?

* I ask every one of you to consider whether you can increase your giving to Advent. The Lord has given us all that we have—can we increase the proportion that we give back to the Lord's work?
* If you have fallen behind the amount you estimated that you would give, and you are able, please bring your giving up to date or even ahead.
* We essentially need an extra Sunday (our budget calls for about $20,000 a week). Can you give double for one week, giving Advent an "extra Sunday" of offering?
* Will/Did you receive a tax refund? Give 10% to support Advent's mission.
* Sign up for Simply Giving. This program makes it simpler for you to give what you plan to give, and simpler for the congregation to pay bills because the money comes in steadily throughout the year.
* Mail in your offerings when you are out of town or unable to attend. Your offering envelopes are mail able.
* Make a special "Pentecost Power" offering on May 23, the day of Pentecost, which is also the last day of Sunday School. We'll have one service only at 9:30, with a festive party after worship.
* Finally, step out in faith with a tithe (giving 10% of your income, as the Bible recommends) for **one week** or **one month**. If you find you cannot manage tithing 10%, commit to a percentage of your income that is a workable challenge for you. I pray that you will find joy in tithing, so that it becomes your regular practice (see God's promise to tithers in Malachi 3:10).
* You may have your own ideas for improving our financial situation. The Council, the Finance Committee, and the Stewardship Team are working on this too. Let us know your ideas.

Upcoming Events

Great ministry keeps happening around here! Dinner theater April 29-May 1. Don't miss the evening with Mary Johnson and O'Shay that Pastor Tim talked about in his Easter sermon. That's May 16 at 6:30 p.m. The annual Garage Sale will be June 10-12. Bring your good stuff to be sold and pitch in to help—it's a service to the community and helps Advent maintain our building. Vacation Bible School (grades 1-5) is the next week, June 14-18. The Middle School mission trip to Rockford, IL is the next week, June 20-26. The 2nd Annual Golf Tournament is June 21—invite your friends! And watch for the Grace Hall Gala—a big party to celebrate our newly completed Hall—and raise some money to offset the "summer slump."

Advent is an awesome congregation of great people with a commitment to Christ's mission and a huge heart for service. We can all be proud to be a part of this wonderful, welcoming community of God's people. We can be confident that when we invite others, they, too, will be blessed at Advent. Thanks for all that you do to build up this body of Christ!

Pastor Morrie Wee