

January 2018

Neighbors in Christ,

Grace and peace be with you, my friends and family. I sit in my favorite chair and write this to you as I reflect on another year behind us, and another beginning in front of us. Yes, admittedly that is a very cliché way to begin my message, but last year for me was indeed a first of many to come. My beautiful twins will soon celebrate their first year, and my wife and I are preparing for nearly 25 people to come into our home for the Christmas holiday. The preparation, self-reflection, and waiting during Advent is nearly finished and the hope of the Christ child is imprinted on our hearts. God comes to us again as an innocent baby boy and we will praise, give thanks, and shout alleluia. Then we will round out the year with another week of relaxation and ring in a new year, starting over again.

Cliché or not, that is exactly what we as the Neighbors in Christ Parish will be doing: we will start over again. You may have already heard, but I want to let you know personally that the relationship we have with St. Paul's Lutheran Church and Rev. Mahlon Bekedam will be concluding May 31, 2018. The NIC Parish Council, after many hours of hard deliberation and discernment, has voted to finish out Pr. Mahlon's "good faith" contract through May. Beloved, I assure you that this is strictly an economic decision and not a personal one – nothing was done specifically to cause this, other than the bottom line being affected. We just simply cannot afford to continue as is and need to look for other ways of having pastoral or lay leadership during worship services on Sunday mornings, and assist me with visitation and being available to you.

Come June through August, the NIC Council has also decided that each month one out the three NIC congregations will enter into a rotation and not have regularly scheduled worships, while I officiate at the other two. You and I are both already aware that attendance is lower during these months and our members take vacations or go to the lake as well. If the church not scheduled to have worship in a certain month chooses to have worship, they will be responsible to find a pulpit supply pastor and cover the costs. I look forward to how we can further come together as a parish and join together serving and praising our loving God.

When September comes around, the Parish Council and I, along with assistance from our SW MN Synod partners, will have already made plans for what will happen next. But I ask for your thoughts, prayers, and recommendations too as we look to the future of the Neighbors in Christ Parish. ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's states "We are church. We are Lutheran. We are church together. We are church for the sake of the world." And I agree, as we are disciples in the resurrected Christ.

A new year brings with it excitement and hope for something different. Just because the pews may not be as full as years past, this does not mean that we should give up, as this is as common across the whole Church. It means that we have a greater opportunity to come together and be the true people God has called us to be. I encourage you to look inward at the gifts God has given you, and to share them with the rest of the parish. Do not wait for someone else to do what you are thinking of. A new year gives us a fresh start, hope, and be the best at what we may possibly be. That is what a new year means for me.

Happy New Year and see you in worship!!!

Rev. Erik Karlson
Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish