

Neighbors in Christ,

Welcome to October, my family, and friends. I absolutely love the cooler temperatures and watching the trees change, even though it seems that it is a bit earlier this year. This month, we notice the crops are turning color, the combines in the fields, and even more trucks on the road – and I think this is a good thing. Seasons change, and with that so do our lives. Football is back, clothes are switched out, and flannel returns to keep us from an occasional chill. Another change is that the youth in our communities return to school and begin a new academic year; and that also means that Sunday School and Confirmation studies begin again as well.

This month's newsletter highlights Christian education, and the biblical foundation that helps our youth throughout their lives. I remember as a child having Sunday School each week with a gentleman who made the stories of the bible seem so magical. He took the biblical narrative and made it come to life in front of our eyes. This is where I received the foundation that began my faith journey all the way up until today. Maybe you have had a similar situation where a person that mentored you helped bring you to where you are currently.

Sunday School is absolutely imperative in a youth's life...in my opinion. This is where our faith life begins. Whether it is in the home, or in the physical church itself, the biblical stories create that groundwork on which the greater church is made. Hearing, reading, talking, praying, and using our imagination is how we grow, and also learn. This is also where our youth begin to understand why the bible is so important in their lives and how they can relate, or parallel, what happened so long ago in their lives today.

Confirmation is also a vital instrument in the faith life of our young people. In our parish, Confirmation studies begin for seventh graders, and last over a two-year period. Generally, we meet on Wednesday evenings to explore how and why the Triune God works in their life. You may remember Confirmation in your earlier days – we have all heard the stories of memorization of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Commandments, and Luther's explanations to each. Yes, we do that too, but I also ask the confirmands what each means in their own adolescence. How do the teachings written and instituted by God affect how they go about their days? My task is for them to want to be there, rather than having to be there – this makes the time spent more fun and enjoyable.

However, Confirmation is not the end all of the faith journey. When the confirmands come to the day to affirm their faith in front of family, friends, and God, I see this as a stepping-stone for them to continue to explore how and where they choose to go next. If they continue to attend worship, share in the Lord's Supper, and hear God's word in a community of faith, it pleases me, as it does you. This tells me that they want to grow in Christ and reaffirms their foundation going forward. Who knows...they may even feel God's call to enter into ministry, just as I did when I was their age.

I was once reminded by a fellow ministry colleague that the best thing a person could do to give back to the church is to help teach Sunday School or Confirmation. The time spent on biblical instruction and consistent growing in knowledge of the bible is a sort of refresher. That is, it reminds us of how and why God did what God did...for us. From Genesis to Revelation, and everything in between, is sometimes foreign to us, and honestly sometimes it is for me as well. But that means we can study and grow more by looking into the biblical texts to further understand the themes of God's love, mercy, covenants, and forgiveness offered to each and everyone of us.

So this is my 'ask' – Would you please consider helping volunteer and teach Sunday School and Confirmation at your respective church? You do not have to know all of the answers, much less the questions about what our youth are studying. That will come over time through learning alongside our beloved youth. Each curriculum allows the student, and the teacher, to learn at a level that makes sense, is fun and enjoyable, and ultimately helps grow in faith. Plus you get to mentor a young person, and maybe – just maybe – you will end up being a cornerstone in their faith life that they can look back upon and say, 'thank you.'

As always, I continue to pray for you and wish you good health in this time of COVID-19. Please be vigilant and regard this virus just like any other sickness: Wear your masks, keep distant from those whom you know, and do not go out of your homes if you are not feeling well. Ultimately we will all get through this. Bless you all. God's peace be with you. And I look forward to seeing you in worship.

In Christ,

Rev. Erik Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish