

## July 2021 Pastoral Message

*“4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. 6 Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. 7 Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. 8 Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, 9 and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” – Deuteronomy 6:4-9*

Grace and peace to you, Neighbors in Christ Parish, from God our Creator, Christ our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Teacher. Amen.

This month I write to you with a few things to think about: worship time changes and the future of Christian Education within our parish. As some of you may already be aware, our NIC Parish Council will soon be considering the worship time schedule that again begins in September of this year. There are a couple of things that they we are considering right now, and we truly need your input.

At the end of this August, our three church communities will have each had the 8:00 am, 9:30 am, and 11:00 am start times for Sunday morning worship; that is, the first three-year cycle will be ending. Now the question remains, do we want to enter into the cycle again and begin another three-year period where each church takes the respective time on an annual schedule? Or consider doing something else? And I really mean that? Do you want to enter into the same schedule we have been going through, or try something different? I ask this because I have heard so many positives, and a lot more negatives, about the times that our worships begin.

Now I know that there is a large amount of congregants who go to the 8:00 am, but truly do not like it. To be blunt, some simply hate it. And I get it...I really do, but if we have three worships on a Sunday, the 8:00 am has to work. I also know that there is also a certain population that cannot even get up before 9:00 am due to physical and logistical circumstances where they live and how they get started in the morning. And this unfortunately keeps them from enjoying the worship experience and the fellowship opportunities of seeing family and friend.

Then there is the 11:00 am. I know that this time is also difficult for some people because, in their opinion, it is too late in the morning and once worship is finished, the day is already half over. This may be true for some, but not for others. And I also know that some do not like it in the fall and early winter because it interferes with their NFL schedule...I'm not making this up folks, this is what I have been told.

And that leaves the sweet spot...the 9:30 am worship, the often most coveted of times. It allows for folks to get ready but is also not too late in the morning when worship has been completed.

Friends and family, it is not my intention as your called pastor to keep you from enjoying worship, your church, and fellowship because you do not like a certain worship time. This

actually pains me, quite truthfully. This is why I am reaching out and asking you to think about how you would like to see the NIC Parish worship schedule go forward. If you enjoy the three-year schedule and you have gotten used to it, please tell me or a leader in your congregation. We will make sure that this is passed along to the respective NIC Parish Council representatives and is discussed at the next meeting. Your input absolutely matters.

But what if there was another way of creating the schedule? What if we went to only two worship times on a Sunday, and a third church got to decide when they wanted to worship? Maybe that could be later on in the day, or even during the week? What if one congregation took the 8:00 am because most folks there like it, and the other two rotated during the other times? ***My family and friends, all options are on the table right now and nothing is being discounted. Again, your input matters.*** But in order to decide what you may find acceptable (and equitable), we need to hear what you have to say.

Another topic I want to get the ball rolling on is about Sunday School and how to make it successful, attended, and also fun. The numbers that are in Christian Youth Education throughout the landscape of the ELCA continue to decline. We know that. We see that. We also see that getting the help to make a successful program on a congregational level also takes an absolute commitment. For those that are doing this, I greatly applaud you and thank you from the bottom of my heart. But what if, my family and friends...what if we could put our respective Christian Education hats on and came together to develop a combined NIC parish Christian Education program? What if we could brainstorm and use the best ideas we have in our congregations and make it a three-church solution?

This month, I will be hosting a meeting at Augustana Lutheran Church on Wednesday July 14, 2021 at 7:00 pm to do just that. I envision a parish-wide Christian Education plan that is situated on a Wednesday evening, has a light worship attached to it, and a meal provided for the youth as well as those adults and adolescents who attend it. Let's bring back the Wednesday Night church night! I see this is a place where we not only need to be, but is also a place for growth and opportunity for multi-generational learning. I really see this as a growth possibility...but in order for this to work, we need to have church by in. We need to have that same commitment given in a different way by our church members. Please, please consider attending this meeting. Not to sound too cliché, but our youth are the future and if they are not tended to like they should be, they will not be there much longer. I really mean that.

Lots and lots is going on right now, and we...I...need your help. Please think about what I have written to you and how this plays out in the future. Again, your input matters!

Blessings,

Rev. Erik Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish