



St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church (UAC)
Butternut, WI (LCMS)

"...the Word of our God will stand forever."
Isaiah 40:8

Thursday of Trinity 14

22 September 2022

Dear baptized and communicant members of St. Paul:

As I write this letter of Christ-centered encouragement to you it is officially the first day of Fall. It sure is shaping up to be a beautiful Fall Season, with the way our gracious God paints His creation so colorfully this time of year. A blessed remainder of the Trinity Season and Season of Fall to you all in Christ.

This letter is from your pastor of 22 years and 11 months here at St. Paul. What a privilege to be your pastor all those years, giving you Christ Jesus and His Word of Law, showing your sin, and Gospel Means of Grace, giving you His forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. I will not fail to preach and teach all of you, and your children's children, "...the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:27) That same all Holy Word of God remains forever standing strong in our lives of the Faith through every cross of affliction and sorrow, and time of rejoicing we have shared together these some 23 years as pastor and people, shepherd and sheep, gathered faithfully around God's Divine Service to us week after week. As Jeremiah writes in Lamentations of the LORD (Christ) our God: "Great is Your faithfulness." (3:23)

And speaking of Christ our God's faithfulness to us, dear members, that is what makes us baptized and faithful communicant members *in* His Church. His faithfulness to us in giving us His Means of Grace (the preached and taught and administered Word of Christ that must be heard and received for faith [Christ] to come to us and abide with us) as a gathered congregation, faithful to their baptismal and confirmation vows in the LORD. I am truly thankful to the LORD for the entire families and individuals faithfully coming to receive and believe Christ and Him crucified preached and given in His Church from Sunday to Sunday, and Wednesday to Wednesday. St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church has a solid, confessional heart and core of faithful members that attend each week here without fail. As the hymn writer said, "...as long as He allows me breath" these faithful baptized and communicant members continue in His Church for Word and Sacrament; and that number keeps growing as God *alone* grows His Church in faithfulness to Christ and all of His Word.

It's clear from the baptismal liturgy and the final question of confirmation that there can be *no excuses* (unless one is physically very sick or unable to go anywhere) to absent ourselves from gathering together as a congregation of Christ for His Gifts week after week. Recall these words from Holy Baptism and Confirmation: "...that together we might hear His Word, receive His gifts, and proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light." (LSB p.271) & "Do you intend to *continue steadfast* in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?" (LSB p.273) Even our St. Paul Constitution and By Laws states the duties of baptized/confirmed/communicant members this way: "Members of the congregation shall conform their entire life to the rule of God's Word, and to that end *make diligent use of the Means of Grace...*" (p.4) So if you are physically unable to attend Church each week, and cannot even get out to the store or are homebound, I will gladly and graciously add you to my shut-in list to come and give you Holy Communion (and even a bag or two of fish caught by yours truly). It must also be stated here, that if you do not intend to come back to St. Paul, please let us know and we can transfer you elsewhere, or release you from our membership. And for many of you who are on our membership roles, but have not been active/faithful to your Baptisms and Confirmations in Christ, this letter is your encouragement to repentantly "Return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." (Joel 2:13)

What a priceless blessing to this pastor to have an exceedingly precious little flock that absolutely knows that Christ Membership and Church Membership go hand-in-hand. We have a Divine Service of God's *only* Means by which your faith and mine is fed and nourished every Sunday at 9:00 am, and every Wednesday at 6:00 pm. We have a truly lively Scripture Study every Sunday after the Divine Service, where we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior and His Holy Word together (and where we have great discussions about current issues/challenges facing Christ's Church [and even a few lame jokes shared each week]). And we have begun again this September with Sunday school, Weekday School, and Lutheran Catechesis for all of our children.

All of this is so that we can, all of us who claim membership in the Church, have membership in Christ, *abide* and *remain* with Jesus Christ through every suffering, struggle, hardship and cross that God gives us in this life. And it prepares us for the final call to our heavenly home in Christ Jesus. Here is how Jesus Himself defined Church Membership ~ Christ Membership, in St. John 15:5 ~ "**I am the Vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can to nothing.**" This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to You, O Christ. The Lord Christ continue to bless your *real* membership in His Church. And I rejoice again to see you this Sunday or Wednesday for the priceless Gifts of Christ's Absolution of our sins, life and salvation in His Word and Body and Blood in His Divine Service to us here at St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church.

+In Christ, Pastor Deitz