

The Emmanuel Epistle

“Praising, Proclaiming and Practicing Emmanuel—God with us—in daily life!”

Pastor’s Keyboard: “Discipleship: “A Sanctuary for you!”

It’s a hot topic and only getting more heated by the moment. I am referring to sanctuary cities, sanctuary churches, sanctuary states, & sanctuary denominations.

A Lutheran denomination recently met in Milwaukee and voted to become a sanctuary church denomination. The resolution which was passed clearly states that individual churches are not obligated to become sanctuary congregations, nor are they encouraged to break the law.

No one wants to see willful disregard of the law. No one wants to see security and safety compromised. No one wants to see children separated from their parents. No one wants to see people, fleeing from persecution and fearing for their lives, being denied access to a place of refuge. So what is the Christian response?

Some people say that the sanctuary movement is circumventing the law and subverting our democracy. Others say that it is a matter of human compassion, and intrinsically a matter of good faith. But whose faith? My faith or the Faith of Jesus? Do I manufacture my own faith, or am I the



recipient of a Spirit-driven, God-given faith?

Regardless of where one falls on the issue at hand, it is important to understand the Biblical roots of the sanctuary movement. The Bible speaks about “God-authorized cities of refuge”. According to Exodus 21:12-14, sanctuary is among the laws given to Moses at Mount Sinai: “Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. However, if he does not do it intentionally, he is to flee to a place I will designate. But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death.”

“Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, Pure and holy, tried and true. With thanksgiving, I’ll be a living, Sanctuary for You.”

—Randy Scruggs & John Thompson

In ancient Israelite law, murder was a capital

offense. The Holy Bible distinguishes between premeditated murder and accidental death or manslaughter and negligent homicide. Only intentional or premeditated killing was punishable by death.

James K. Hoffmeier, professor of Old Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, writes, “The reason why people in Bible times sought sanctuary was because of the *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation, or the ‘eye for an eye’ principle. The natural human impulse is to extract more than ‘an eye for eye and tooth for tooth.’ Put another way, the punishment exceeded the crime. When the Old Testament law introduced the law of retaliation, it was to limit punishment to fit the crime, as Exodus 21:23-25 specifies: ‘if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.’”

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**August 2019
Newsletter
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Food For Thought:

“God is wholly present in all creation, in every corner, behind you and before you. Do you think that God is sleeping on a pillow in heaven? God is watching over you and protecting you.”

—Martin Luther

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RALLY DAY—Saturday, September 14

Adults & Youth will rally on September 14 for the kickoff of our fall Christian Education program. Special activities are being planned for all ages. Ice cream sundaes will be served. We will meet at Oasis Church at 5pm. G.I.F.T.—Growing In Faith Together (Adults) and Saturday School (Youth) will be offered weekly on Saturdays. Thanks for making Christian education a priority in your household and in the Emmanuel family!

Women’s Bible Study begins on September 5

Women of Emmanuel and their friends will gather twice a month to study the Prophet Isaiah. Isaiah is sometimes referred to as the Fifth Gospel. Isaiah is the most quoted prophet in the New Testament. The

Book of Isaiah is second only to Psalms in the number of verse quotations from Hebrew Scripture found in the New Testament. The name Isaiah means, “The LORD is my salvation”. Women will meet in the Oasis Church Fellowship Hall on Thursday afternoons from 1:00-2:30pm. **Class Dates:** September 5 & 12; October 3, 10, & 31; November 7 & 14; and December 5 & 12.

Men’s Bible Study—September 10 **“Augsburg Confession”**

The men of Emmanuel are concluding their study on the Psalter on Sept. 3. Beginning on **September 10**, we will launch into a new study, a 16 week course on the Augsburg Confession. In 1530, the Lutheran Reformers presented a statement of faith to the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles, in the town of Augsburg, Germany. This statement of faith became known as the Augsburg Confession. It was penned by Luther’s dear friend Philip Melanchthon. It is considered to be the bedrock & summary of what it means to be Lutheran. The Augsburg Confession is a true confession of the Christian faith because Christ Himself is expressed in it. This study is an opportunity for growing deeper in one’s Lutheran identity & walk of discipleship. Join us!

GIFT on Saturday Nights (5pm)—Sept. 14ff.

A Teaching Document—“The Bible as the Word of God” was presented at the NALC Convocation. Members of Emmanuel will be studying this document each Saturday night. We will also be using a Bible Study entitled, “Renewing the Local Church— A Biblical Perspective.” Please join us!

WORSHIP SERVANTS FOR SEPTEMBER

Saturday, September 7 - Pentecost XIII (6pm)

Scripture Reader & Prayers: Jean Wanek
Ushers: Edwards Family & Matt Serr
Acolyte: Mason Edwards

Saturday, September 14 - Pentecost XIV (6pm)

Scripture Reader & Prayers: Larry Vomhof
Ushers: Rich Sunde and Creig Anderson
Acolyte: Gavin Edwards

Saturday, September 21 - Pentecost XV (6pm)

Scripture Reader & Prayers: Deb Vomhof
Ushers: Larry Vomhof & Joe Vomhof
Acolyte: Nora Serr

Saturday, September 28 - Pentecost XVI (6pm)

Scripture Reader & Prayers: Lee Pearce
Ushers: LeRoy Quam & Rich Sunde
Acolyte: Nora Serr

PIANIST: Mary Ann Groven (LBW)

Communion Assistant: Jenna Serr
Sound & Coffee: Deb Vomhof and Julie Steffenson
Treats: Julie Edwards

PIANIST: MarJean Damerval (Bread of Life)

Communion Assistant: Judy Caudill
Sound & Coffee: Don & Peg Holtan
Treats: Julie Steffenson

PIANIST: MarJean Damerval (Bread of Life)

Communion Assistant: Deb Vomhof
Sound & Coffee: Don & Peg Holtan
Treats: Jean Wanek

PIANIST: Beth Daede (LBW)

Communion Assistant: Lee Pearce
Sound & Coffee: Don & Peg Holtan
Treats: Judy Pearce

NOTE: Julie Steffenson will take care of set up & Janet Sunde & friends will take care of the take down. Pastor Dave will be our worship leader and preacher each week. Greeters for the month: Arne & Samia Nelson.

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Should an individual be killed, a family member, known as a redeemer or avenger, was obliged to seek justice.”

In Numbers 35:11-15, we read, “When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, select some towns to be your cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee. They will be places of refuge from the avenger, so that a person accused of murder may not die before he stands trial before the assembly. These six towns you give will be cities of refuge for the people of Israel, & for the stranger, & for the sojourner among them so that anyone who has killed another accidentally can flee there.” In other words, according to Scripture, the purpose of a sanctuary city was to guarantee due-process; safe zones to which the person who had accidentally killed someone could flee, to be protected from excessive retribution and have the case heard by an impartial judge.

The purpose of the six sanctuary cities (Numbers 35; Deuteronomy 19; Joshua 20), in the Promised Land, was not to circumvent the law, but rather to guarantee that justice was performed in an equitable fashion. Hoffmeier writes, “The biblical practice of sanctuary, then, was to protect the offender from vigilante justice and to guarantee one received a fair trial. A person who was found guilty of intentionally murdering someone should be removed from the protection of the sanctuary and receive his punishment. This practice is clearly stated in Exodus 21:14: ‘take him away from my altar and put him to death.’ ... American cities, counties and universities that offer sanctuary for foreigners who have broken American laws regulating entry to our country cannot claim to be following the practice described in the Bible.” A city of refuge was not a place for the guilty to escape justice, but rather a place of protection to guarantee justice for all.

But what about compassion? Are we not required by God to bring the homeless poor into our own houses (Isaiah 58)? Are we not commanded by Christ to exercise Good Samaritan love and to “go and do likewise” (Luke 10)? In Matthew 25, The Final Judgment, the King sits on His Throne and proclaims judgment: “Depart from me you cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, for I was hungry, thirsty, naked, a stranger, sick and in prison, and you turned a blind eye to me.” “When Lord?” “As you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” The Torah commands us not to take advantage of the stranger and not to abuse him – because we, too, were once aliens, in Egypt. That is, anyone who has been through the experience of being a refugee cannot allow himself to ignore the distress of the other. In Leviticus 19:33-34, we read, “The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” In Exodus 22:21, we read, “Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt.” The Holy Family—Joseph & Mary, and infant Jesus, escaped the wrath of King Herod and the slaughter of the holy innocents, by settling in Egypt as refugees.

In their book, Welcoming the Stranger, Matthew Soerens and Jenny Yang remind us that immigration is a common theme in the Scriptures. The Hebrew word *ger* (a person not native to the local area) appears 92 times in the Old Testament. Abraham and Sarah were immigrants/strangers/foreigners. So was Joseph when his brothers sold him into slavery. The Israelites escaping Egyptian persecution were refugees. Ruth, a Moabitess, migrated to Israel, married Boaz & became the great-grandmother of King David. “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20), so in TRUTH we all are foreigners and strangers on earth, receiving & distributing hospitality. In the Bible, the foreigner or sojourner (*ger*) appears repeatedly in conjunction with two other categories of people: the fatherless and the widow; see Psalm 146:9; Deuteronomy 10:18 & 24:19-21; Ezekiel 22:7; Zechariah 7:10; and Malachi 3:5. “God does not suggest that we welcome immigrants, He commands it.”

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares”—Hebrews 13:2. We cannot throw Christ-centered compassion out the window. God will not permit it. Hardness of heart is a sin. We must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29). But we must also be subject to the governing authorities (Romans 13). James Edwards writes, “Even desperate circumstances don’t make a lawless act moral.” Rick Warren writes, “A good Samaritan doesn’t stop and ask, ‘Are you legal or illegal?’” Migration happens because of many factors: e.g. poverty, persecution, war, & environmental degradation. Regardless of our private position on immigration, one fact remains: “immigrants, regardless of their legal status, are human beings made in the image of God, in need of our Christ-centered neighborly love.” John Piper writes, “Give honor to the law and show mercy to the immigrants.”

A sanctuary is a holy place, where God resides. The Bible reminds us that our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit. We are portable worship spaces. Let us remember that we too are aliens and exiles in this land. The United States is not our permanent residence. Love God most! Love your neighbor as yourself. Make disciples of all nations! Be a *ger*!

I AM a Sanctuary, for YOU! In Christ, Pastor Dave

Highlights from the NALC Convocation August 2019 in Indianapolis

- Four members of Emmanuel Lutheran Church (Deb & Larry Vomhof, and Julie & Pastor Dave Steffenson) enjoyed a Christ-centered and Spirit-filled NALC Convocation on August 7-9. Pastor Dave and Deb served as Emmanuel's delegates.
- More than 800 delegates and visitors gathered in Indianapolis. The theme of this year's Convocation was "*Walking by the Spirit with the Fruit of the Spirit.*"
- The Rev. Dan Selbo was elected as bishop on the fourth ballot. Pastor Selbo is currently serving as pastor of St. Timothy's Lutheran Church in San Jose, CA. His term of office begins on October 1. Pray for Bishop Dan & Mary Selbo.
- New this year was the use of electronic voting devices called "Qwizdom". Paper ballots will probably return next year.
- Bible Study Leader, Dr. James Nestigen, was grounded by fog in Denver, and unable to attend. Gemechis Buba filled in and did superbly. He reminded us that "I have 0% self-confidence, and 100% confidence in Jesus."
- A banquet honoring Bishop John Bradosky was held during the Convocation. Bishop John is retiring and did not seek reelection. Bishop John in his sermon reminded us that "Eternal Life is NOW!" Martin Luther writes, "Why would anyone try to earn what they already have?" Faith in Christ alone gives us eternal life because it gives us JESUS, Who is eternal life. Christ is the Gospel. The Gospel is for life now, not just in the future. Bishop John also reminded us that "a one-winged bird cannot fly." We must combine salvation with discipleship. Faith is for good works. Salvation & social ministry are a pair. We can't just proclaim the Gospel. We can't just care for people. We must do both, for the glory of God the Father!
- Greetings were received from our Ecumenical and Inter-Lutheran Guests, including representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (8.3 million members; 8500 churches).
- Water Missions, one of Emmanuel's ministry partners, reported that around the world, 400,000 people got safe water last year. Water builds hope. Brochures are available (resource table).

- Grace without discipleship is not grace. Bonhoeffer: "Cheap Grace is the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner." Pew Research 2015: 38-40% of those born after 1980 have NO FAITH. In Matthew 16, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter replies, "You are the Christ. The Son of the Living God." "Now don't tell me," Jesus says, "Go tell the world!"
- Statistics: The NALC has 433 congregations (96 of which are dual NALC/LCMC), 669 clergy, & 142,500 members. Annual reports were submitted to the NALC by only 58% of the congregations. Good news: Emmanuel of Rochester was one of the 58%. Approximately 27% of the NALC congregations did not provide financial support to the NALC in 2018. Suggested giving to the NALC is 5-7% of a congregation's budget. Call process: 22 full-time vacancies and 12 part-time. 125 pastors have submitted their mobility papers.
 - The 2020 Budgets were approved:
Operating Budget: \$2.2 Million
Theological Education & Seminary: \$723,000
Great Commission Fund: \$197,500
Disaster Response Fund: \$123,500
- Future dates & locations of the Lutheran Week NALC Convocations:
August 3-7, 2020 in Pittsburgh, PA
August 2-6, 2021 in Corpus Christi, TX

FRIENDSHIP SATURDAY—October 5

Joe Vomhof received a \$250 Thrivent Action Team grant in support of our October 5 "Friendship Celebration". **Don and Peg Holtan will be our worship musicianaries that night.** Friendship Cake will be served. Members of Emmanuel are being asked to bring a special friend with them to worship that night. Guests/Friends will receive a special gift. So start thinking about & praying for the special friend you want to bring with you to worship on October 5. Remember! A Friend's a friend forever if the Lord's the Lord of them!

SEMAC 2020—Emmanuel Ministry Partner

The location/date of the 2020 South East Minnesota Area Christians mission trip has been determined. Larry Vomhof and his crew will be serving with the NALC Disaster Response team in **Dayton, Ohio during the weeks of February 9-21.** Volunteers, prayers, and financial support are welcomed!

LUTHERAN CORE

Dennis Nelson, Executive Director

At a recent Church Assembly, the ELCA adopted ‘A Declaration of Inter-religious Commitment’ as ‘church policy for inter-religious relations.’ The Declaration says, ‘We must be careful about claiming to know God’s judgments regarding another religion.’ It also stated, ‘Lutheran tradition has understood the word ‘faith’ to mean trust rather than affirming beliefs. Hence, we also must be careful not to judge our neighbors only on the basis of their religious beliefs. . . . All we know, and all we need to know, is that our neighbors are made in God’s image and that we are called to love and serve them.’

Scripture & our Lutheran Confessions are clear when it comes to God’s judgment on other religions. Pastor Dennis Nelson writes “I am not showing love for & I am not serving my neighbors (which the declaration calls upon me to do) if I do not warn them that what and/or whom they are placing their trust in is not worthy of their trust.” . . . “A voting member at the ELCA assembly reminded the assembly that in the words of Jesus in John 14:6 we do have ‘a basis to know God’s views on religions that do not require faith in Jesus Christ.’ This voting member proposed an amendment to the “Declaration” both prior to & during the assembly. His motion to amend was overwhelmingly defeated. The policy statement was adopted with 97.48% voting in favor.

Nelson continues, “Contrast the actions & priorities of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly and its de-emphasis upon Jesus with the clear statements from the Rev. Dr. Daniel Selbo, who was elected to be the new bishop of the NALC (North American Lutheran Church). In answer to the question, ‘What hopes do you have for the mission of the NALC?’ Pastor Selbo wrote, ‘As a Christ Centered church body my hope is that we will continue to grow in our relationship with Jesus as our Savior and Lord. I hope each member of the NALC will become stronger in their own personal faith-walk with Christ. I hope our preaching and teaching will lift

up the name of Jesus. . . . My hope is that Christ will be seen in us because we have fallen in love with Him and we have no greater purpose in life than to live for Him. . . . Because ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,’ we must be tireless in our efforts to increase the number of people who come to know Him as Lord.’

Pastor Nelson adds, “In a YouTube video (‘Love! Don’t Judge!—Being Polyamorous and Christian is not a Sin’), Bishop Elect Leila Ortiz of the ELCA’s Metro Washington D.C. Synod speaks favorably of polyamory (a relationship in which there are three or more partners).” Let us pray for our friends in the ELCA. May our good Lord help all who are leaving Scripture & the faith of Jesus, see the error of their ways, repent, and come back to the Truth.

The ELCA also voted to become a Sanctuary Church Denomination. The ELCA asserts that all of their actions are matters of faith, not political.

“Lutherans for Life”—Rev. Dr. James I. Lamb

“The first truth of life is that every life is the handiwork of God. From the very beginning, it seems that God’s hands were involved in life. He formed Adam from the dust of the ground. He made Eve from one of Adam’s ribs. The word “made” literally means “to build.” So with the first two human beings, you get this picture of God intimately involved with His hands, forming and building. That involvement continues in the biological process for procreation God set into motion. The Psalmist says that God “knitted” (Psalm 139:13) each of us together in our mother’s womb. Job & Isaiah talk about God shaping and forming us in the womb. Yes, the truth is every life is the handiwork of God. Maybe some of you have one of Great Grandma’s old quilts displayed somehow in your homes. It may be too ragged and thin to be useful. It may not even look all that good because of fading and tears and stains. Nevertheless, there it is proudly draped for all to see. You know the quilt’s value does not come from its usefulness or its looks. It comes from the one who made it. So it is with every human life.”

A second truth of life is that every life is bought with

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Emmanuel Lutheran of Rochester, Minnesota

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SAVE THE DATES!

Friendship Saturday Worship

Saturday, October 5 (6pm)

Thanksgiving Eve Worship & Pie Social

November 27 at Madonna Towers (6pm)

—continued from page 5—Lutherans for Life

a price. What if Great Grandma's quilt, instead of being passed along, got put on the auction block when Grandma died? How much would you be willing to give for that quilt that always lay at the foot of the bed in that spare room; that kept you warm on winter nights when you visited; that, with a couple of chairs, made a tent for you and your cousins? I'm guessing you would be willing to pay quite a price. When you did, that quilt would be doubly valuable. Valuable because it was Great Grandma's & valuable because you had to pay dearly to get it back. Christ—the WAY, the TRUTH and the LIFE, born in Mary's womb, paid the price for our salvation—for every sin and sinner, by becoming sin for us on the cross.

A third truth of life is that God desires a relationship, both now and forever, with those He created and redeemed. He wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of His truth (1 Timothy 2:4). He wants to adopt every human being, through faith in Christ Jesus, into His family, lead them, walk with them, and accomplish His purpose for each human life. It's like when great grandma used to wrap you up in that quilt and hold you close. You felt loved and protected and safe.

These three truths point us to a single truth—every human life has value. That value does not come from its usefulness or how it looks or how big or healthy or productive it is. The value of human life comes from the One who made it & bought it back. When a life is destroyed, the blood-bought handiwork of God is destroyed. We are messing with 'grandma's quilt.'"

Back Page Stories

Madonna Towers Ministry:

Pastor Dave is leading worship & preaching at the Madonna Towers Skilled Care Chapel twice a month on Wednesdays in 2019. Members of Emmanuel are invited to participate in this wonderful ministry to seniors of our community. Our next Worship Services will be on Wednesdays, September 4 & 25 at 1:00pm. Give Lee Pearce a call if you would like to help with this wonderful ministry.

Thrivent Choice Dollars: Don't forget to go call Thrivent (1-800-847-4836) or go online to designate your Choice Dollars. By phone, when prompted, say, "Thrivent Choice". They will ask for your full name and date of birth. Emmanuel has received

\$1,226.00 in Choice Dollars—Year-to-Date. Thank you!

Church Council Highlights:

August 5, 2019: We have in excess of \$150,000 in our Emmanuel Building Fund and Reserves. But our current Budget for 2019 is showing a shortfall of \$8,800 for the first seven months. The mid-year financial audit is pending. New Bible Studies for men & women will begin in Sept. Rally Day is Sept. 14. Pastor Dave will be attending a 3-day conference in Carlyle, IL on September 17-19. Excellent weather, great food, & fellowship was enjoyed by everyone at the August 4 church picnic, hosted by the Vomhof's. 3 households of Emmanuel hosted a National Night Out event in their neighborhood:

Serr's, Engle's, and Steffenson's. Don't forget to "Bring a Friend to Church" on Saturday, October 5! Don and Peg Holtan will be our "musicianaries". The September Council Meeting will be held on Friday, September 13 at 1pm.

Iowa Mission District: This year's Convocation will be held at FLC in Manchester, IA on September 14 (9am-3pm). The theme this year is: "Sola Gratia" (Grace Alone). The Rev. Dr. Nathan Yoder, a member of the NALC Commission on Theology & Doctrine, and Dean of the Carolinas Mission District, will be the keynote speaker. Emmanuel is entitled to two voting delegates. Members of Emmanuel who are interested in attending this event and serving as one of our delegates, should contact Pastor Dave Steffenson.