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# THE EMMANUEL EPISTLE

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

## Pastor’s Keyboard: “Discipleship—gods at war”

The Ten Commandments begin with a word of promise: “I AM the LORD your God.” The great I AM who I AM for whom I Choose to be, The LORD God Almighty, binds himself as “for you” as opposed to “against you”. Then follows an essential prohibition: “You shall have no other gods (period)!”

Some add the words “before” or “besides” assuming that God is content with rivals as long as God is first. But our God is a jealous God, a consuming fire, tolerating no competition (Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24). Our God is exclusive! No graven images are permitted (Ex. 20:4-5). You shall have no other gods before me; i.e. “in my presence”.

Kyle Idleman, author of “Not a Fan” is also the author of another great read entitled, “god’s at war”. In this book Idleman reminds us that we are the recipients of many wonderful gifts from God, but these gifts can morph into idols in the hands of self-deifying sinners. Idleman identi-



fies Idolatry as the number one issue in the Bible. We are created & redeemed for worship. It is written, “You shall worship the LORD your God and Him only shall you serve.”

Our hearts are the “bunker hill” – the battleground of the gods (Matthew 15:17-19). The church is the bride of Jesus. Idolatry is adultery; i.e. a cheating spouse. “Let marriage be held in honor among all, & let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral & adulterous” (Hebrews 13:4)!

***“We love others best when we love God most.”***

Idleman shares this story: “Kylie Bisutti knew exactly what goals she was pursuing. She wanted to be a fashion model, & she succeeded at the highest level. In

2009, Bisutti won a competition against 10,000 rivals in the Victoria’s Secret Model search.”

“Just before her dreams came true, Bisutti had gotten married. She & her husband were followers of Christ, and she couldn’t help but think about what she was doing & the example she was setting. She realized there was a great deal of difference between modeling clothing & flaunting provocative undergarments.”

Bisutti writes, “I finally achieved my biggest dream, the dream I always wanted. But when I finally got it, it wasn’t all I thought it would be.” “Her greatest goal was unmasked as just another god that couldn’t deliver.”

“Ultimately it became a worship choice. So she turned in her wings and stepped down from lingerie modeling.”

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**January 2015  
Newsletter  
Volume 3  
Issue 1**

### ***Food For Thought:***

*“God is jealous for your heart, not because He is petty or insecure, but because He loves you. The reason why God has such a huge problem with idolatry is that His love for you is all-consuming. He loves you too much to share you.”*

*Kyle Idleman, gods at war*

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## SATURDAY SCHOOL: Resumes Jan. 10

PLEASE NOTE: We did not meet for Saturday School on December 27 and January 3. Having completed our three week class on Holy Communion, we will make Communion Bread (unleavened bread) in church on Saturday, January 10. We will also watch a wonderful DVD entitled "Mario's First Communion". January 10 is a feast day in the life of the church: The Baptism of our Lord. We will commemorate this feast day with the baptism of Marek Konop (son of Joe and Amber), and the gift of homemade Communion Bread in worship.

### Twelve Days of Christmas Bell Ringing Service: January 3, 2015

*"The Bells of Christmas chime once more, the heavenly guest is at the door."* Bring your bells to church and help us ring in the New Year while sounding the good news that "Christ is born to save". Emmanuel Lutheran will have a special worship liturgy on Saturday night, January 3 in celebration of the Season of Christmas. Did you know that Christmas is a Season and not just a day? Did you know that the Keeping of the Twelve Days is a Tradition that began in 567 AD, the purpose of which was to allow God's people more time to reflect upon the gift of the Incarnation and to celebrate God's presence among us as Emmanuel? Some start counting the days on December 25, while others begin on December 26 and run through Epiphany (January 6). So we have a dozen or perhaps a baker's dozen of DAYS to celebrate the Incarnation. *"Come, Jesus, glorious heavenly guest, & keep your Christmas in our breast."* - LBW #62.

**Open House at Pastor Dave & Julie's place**—6330 Fairway Drive N.W.—Rochester MN. Pastor Dave and Julie are hosting a Christmas Open House on Sunday, Jan. 4 from 1-4 p.m. Beverages, desserts, snacks and Christmas goodies will be served. In preparation for Epiphany, we'll read the story of the Magi (Matthew 2) & sing some favorite Epiphany Songs (We Three Kings of Orient Are; As With Gladness Men of Old; Bright and Glorious Is the Sky; The First Noel; & It Came Upon A Midnight Clear). We hope you can join us as we celebrate the Twelve Days and the Feast of Epiphany. We'll even have King Cake!

**Looking Ahead:** Emmanuel will host its first **Mother-Daughter Event** on Sat, May 2, 2015 (11am-2pm). Judy Pearce & friends are organizing this event. Save the Date and bring that special mother or daughter in your life to this special event!

## Emmanuel Annual Meeting Saturday, January 24

Members of Emmanuel Lutheran will assemble following worship on January 24 for our Annual Meeting. We will be approving Constitution & Bylaw changes, 2015 Budget, and electing people to the following positions:

Two—2 year council position (Arne Nelson & Kari Richards have agreed to serve) and One—1 year council position (Don Holtan has agreed to serve).

Nominating Committee for 2015—four people needed (Judy Pearce & Leitha Bothun have agreed to serve)!

Audit Committee for 2015—three people needed (Larry Vomhof, Darald Bothun, & Rich Sunde have agreed to serve)!

Financial Secretary for 2015: Deb Vomhof has agreed to serve.

Voting Lay-member for NALC Convocations: Lee Pearce has agreed to serve.

**Enrollment for membership at Emmanuel Lutheran in 2015 is now open. Complete a Discipleship Membership Covenant and give it to Pastor Dave before January 13, 2015.**

### LEADERSHIP TRAINING—Discipleship

Pastor Mark Schwartz and the members of South Zumbro Lutheran (Kasson) have invited us to join them for a Council Retreat and Congregational Leadership Event. Rev. Mark Vander Tuig (Service Coordinator of LCMC) will be the guest speaker. Topic: "Discipleship"

Dates: \* Friday, February 6 @ 6pm—Hubble House in Mantorville for dinner & meeting; council only.  
\* Saturday, February 7 @ 10am—South Zumbro Church for "Discipleship Workshop".  
All are welcome!

## “News from Jim & Diane Wagner”

Dear Friends and Supporters, Greeting in the Name of Jesus! It has been chilly in Vilnius, but not yet bitterly cold. The coldest night so far this winter was about 12 degrees F, which isn't bad for those of us raised in the upper Midwest. We hope the milder days continue, especially when our son John and his family are visiting. We are anxiously awaiting their arrival on 16 December.

Our ministry at the International Church has been a joy these last fifteen months. Attendance seems to hold at nearly thirty each week, and the lowest has been about nineteen – which is pretty good for this congregation. Sometimes we wish we were more successful in drawing the English-speaking community, but the regulars tell us the attendance is really good. Before we came there were evidently weeks when only six or eight people were present. We have also presided at several weddings (the 2 couples who are local have continued to attend!), two baptisms and one funeral. In addition there is a weekly lay-led bible study, a weekly women's bible study and a monthly young adult group. Sunday school is on-again off-again, depending on the children we have present any given Sunday. Last year there were more children than this year. All in all we believe that many are hearing and gladly receiving the Good News of Jesus' love and forgiveness. More than anything else, this is why we are here!

Worship and preaching have been both a joy and a challenge! Jim has been preaching without notes from the head of the aisle ever since we

arrived. It is a more-or-less new experience for him. Communication seems to be better but an old man's forgetfulness can also be a real problem! Choosing hymns continues to be a challenge since our people come from so many different backgrounds. The addition of our new Covenant Hymnals in May has been a great help and we are grateful to Lindsborg Covenant Church for this gift of love.

In the last few months Diane has been busier than last year. She continues to attend the bible studies and young adults' group, but is now also being called upon more regularly into a ministry with individual women. She has also been called upon to visit an expat in the local mental hospital.

Our social life here is a continual round of concerts and other events. These are good fun, but more importantly they are a chance to be visible in the English-speaking community. For example, last Saturday was the Danish Christmas Lunch, this Friday is the English Christmas Carol social, and this Saturday is the Swedish St. Lucia Festival. Then, Sunday evening is our own Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. At a recent Danish event collar-clad Jim said to the Chamber President, "I just want to be visible." To which he responded, "Don't worry, you are!"

As many of you know, we were able to spend three weeks in India last summer at the home of one of our student members. It was an unforgettable experience. We did not travel much - although we did see the Taj Mahal - but we had a great time with his family, and Jim was able to preach seven times in nine days. It is nearly impossible

to describe what it is like preaching in a packed Pentecostal Church at 90 degrees F with no air conditioning. But again, Jim's messages seemed to be well-received. Our student was an excellent translator!

In September and October Diane spent 6 weeks back in the USA with our children & grandchildren as well as her 92 year old mother. She had a great time and now we are looking forward to eight or ten weeks back in the USA in early summer. Jim's 50th high school reunion is in July as is the ELCA Summer Missionary Conference, and we are expecting our twelfth grandchild in May. Perhaps we will see some of you as we make our way around the good old USA. We treasure your prayers and support!

A Blessed Christmas to all,  
Jim & Diane

**Facebook:  
Wagners in Lithuania**

### ***SOUTH EAST MN AREA CHRISTIANS VOLUNTEERS OFFERING A HELPING HAND***

Please keep Larry Vomhof and his faithful volunteers in your prayers as they depart to Brookport-Unionville, Illinois for servant work during the weeks of January 25-February 7, 2015. They will help rebuild after last year's tornadoes.

Since 1998, Larry and his group of 25 volunteers have been using their God-given talents & faith to bring hope & healing to communities hit by various forms of natural disaster. If you would like to participate in this servant work, offering your time, money, or prayers, give Larry a call.

## Emmanuel Lutheran of Rochester, Minnesota

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Attn. Pastor Dave Steffenson

### Contact Information:

253-302-9845 (Mobile)

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### SAVE THE DATE!

*Saturday, April 18, 2015 (6pm)  
Emmanuel Lutheran Choir,  
Grafton, IA will perform an Easter  
Cantata at Emmanuel Lutheran of  
Rochester, MN*

*Continued from page 1, Pastor's page...*

Following Jesus means unmasking the idols that camouflage themselves as our best friends. Remember, the thief comes only to steal, kill & destroy. Jesus came that we might have abundant life! Idols are wolves disguised in lamb's clothing. The gods of sex, entertainment, success, family, achievement, romance, money, food, & me, all seek to transform a holy gift of God into a hangman's noose of self-destruction. Idols are defeated, not by being removed, but by being replaced. "We love others best when we love God most."

God speaks through the prophet Jeremiah, "My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jer. 2:9-13). Jesus invitation offered to the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's well (Jn. 4) is offered to us as well: "Drink from me and you'll never thirst again."

The battlefield of the heart; gods at war, but in Christ the victory is already ours! "I AM"...the LORD your God!

*A Servant of Emmanuel, Pastor Dave Steffenson*

**A GIFT FOR YOU!** *Emmanuel Lutheran Church* is beginning an annual tradition of providing a Christmas keepsake ornament for each family. We hope these keepsakes will provide cherished memories of your life at *Emmanuel* as you decorate with them each year. Be sure to get yours. Special thanks to our anonymous donor.

## Back Page Stories

### Men's Bible Study Breakfast:

Weekly fellowship around God's Word at 8 am Tuesdays at Charlie's (1408 2nd. St. SW). Join us in being Evangelical. Invite a friend. Share the Good News!

**Super Market Saturday:** The next Channel One opportunity is January 17, 2015 (9 am—Noon). Let's share the heart of Emmanuel by caring for the needs of our neighbors.

**Women's Bible Study:** Our study on I Corinthians has ended. Our next study will begin after Easter.

**Council Highlights (Dec. 16):** The generosity of our members and supporters has positioned Emmanuel into excellent financial shape as we end our fiscal year. We have used only \$7,400.00 of our Reserves YTD. Oasis Church intends to renew our

building lease for 2015 at the same rental fee. A women's Mother-Daughter event will take place on Saturday, May 2, 2015. Preparations for our Annual Meeting on Saturday, January 24, following worship, are well underway. Pastor Steffenson's designated housing was approved for 2015. Kari Richards is assembling a wish list for 2015. Christmas advertisement in the Post-Bulletin has been taken care of. Emmanuel has been invited to attend South Zumbro's council/leadership retreat on Feb. 6-7. Pastor Steffenson will be participating in the Mission Trip to Illinois being organized by Larry Vomhof. Jan. will be our secretary, Kalo Lockerby's final council meeting. We thank her for her faithful servant work during 2014. Our next Council Meeting is Tues, Jan. 13, 2015 at 10a.m. Discipleship Membership Covenants will be approved on Jan. 13, 2015.

**Special Offerings:** Our designated offering for Thanksgiving was the Pastor's Discretionary Fund (\$290.00 was received). The designated offering for Christmas is the NALC Seminary. Thanks for generous giving!

**Liturgies:** During January we will use LBW Setting II.

**THANKSGIVING:** We are thanking God for our supporters and prayer partners. Thanks for investing in God's Church in Rochester, MN.

**Please keep Jim & Diane Wagner (International Church of Vilnius in Lithuania) and St. Paul Lutheran Fellowship (Twin Cities Church Plant), in your prayers.**

**Pastor Dave is taking Mondays as his weekly day off. Please call for emergencies only. Thanks!**