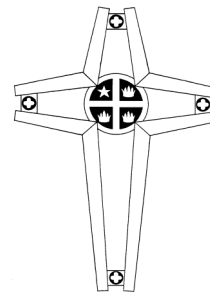


# The Star

The Monthly Newsletter of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Epiphany  
An ELCA Congregation



Volume MMXXIII  
Number 10  
October 2023

God calls us to: "**Grow** our relationship with God,  
**connect** with each other, and **serve** the world."



Dear Epiphany Disciples,

October is usually the time of the year when congregations prayerfully discuss financial stewardship. We believe in a God of abundance who graciously gives us everything we need to make ministry happen in this place. When we offer our monetary gifts for ministry at Epiphany, we are putting our trust in God's call for this congregation to grow, connect, and serve. All of which is to say that while some people dread talking about financial stewardship, I get excited because it gives each of us a chance to think about how we can use our money, time, skills, and gifts to be a blessing in Jesus' name.

When a congregation is working toward a capital campaign, it is common for leaders to make sure giving towards the annual budget is also emphasized. We do so much at Epiphany and I'm so thankful for your intentional and faithful giving to support our day-to-day operations.

After discussing various options with our Finance Team, Congregation Council, and Capital Campaign Consultants, we will be doing some different things for our financial stewardship appeal for the 2024 budget. Rather than doing a separate appeal to the congregation this fall for the 2024 spending plan and another appeal for the capital campaign in late February, we're going to have one appeal for the 2024 spending plan and capital campaign.

Practically, here's what this means:

-If you are planning on increasing your giving to Epiphany for the 2024 spending plan, please consider doing so now and let Mickey Miller know. Our Finance Team is working with our various Committees and Ministry Teams to put together a responsible budget for 2024 that helps us to continue to move forward in ministry. I'm excited about what God has in store for us in 2024!

-We usually have a projection of offerings based off your intent to give cards when we present the budget for congregation approval. Because we're asking you to fill out your intent to give in late February 2024 and the congregation meeting happens no later than the end of

January, we won't have those figures with the 2024 budget. With that said, we have other ways we can project offerings and will use those for this year.

-Our budget is a spending plan. While the Congregation approves the budget, we have a strong Finance Team, Congregation Council, Staff, Committee Chairs, and other leaders who do an excellent job of monitoring expenses. Over the last several years, and especially during the first years of the pandemic, our congregation has done an outstanding job of making needed adjustments to help responsibly manage our money. That will continue to be the case.

The Spirit is alive and active in this place in many ways. Thank you, people of Epiphany, for the many ways you have consistently modeled generosity. Because of you, we're able to reach more people with the good news of God's love. I'm proud to be your pastor.

Yours in Christ,

*Pastor Ruell*



There are two important events happening at Epiphany for our upcoming capital campaign that you are asked to attend.

On Saturday, September 30, we are gathering from 9-Noon in the Fellowship Hall for the Organ Forum. This will be an important opportunity to learn more about the condition issues, including at least one major safety issue, for our pipe organ. We will hear the various options for replacement and have a chance for open discussion.

On Sunday, October 22 after worship, we will be gathering for a light lunch in the Fellowship Hall. After lunch, we will have our Building and Grounds Forum. This will be a chance to think about the importance of our church home, hear about the work our Management Committee and Property Team have done throughout the years, evaluate the condition of our building and grounds, and prioritize potential projects for the capital campaign. You'll see a separate signup in early October.



## Opportunities for Disaster Giving

**Matching Funds for Maui:** Make a contribution to help people affected in Maui. For every \$2 donated through Thrivent's online giving platform or a Thrivent Charitable Impact and Investing® donor-advised fund grant to an organization listed, Thrivent will add \$1 up to \$250,000. **Learn more; give today.**

**Direct Aid to Florida:** On August 30, Hurricane Idalia made landfall in Florida's Big Bend region. The storm surge was at historic levels. All that was a little less than a year after Hurricane Ian struck Florida's SW coast, leaving a similar path of destruction. As the Florida-Bahamas Synod responds, you can help share God's hope, healing and renewal. **Give directly to the FB Synod.**

**General Disaster Giving: Lutheran Disaster Response** shares God's hope, healing, and renewal with people whose lives have been disrupted by disasters in the U.S. and beyond. When the dust settles and the headlines change, LDR stays to provide ongoing help. **Give to LDR today.**

## TOY DONATIONS



Next trip to Nora will be Monday, October 23rd.

Then on Monday, December 4th, I will be making a special trip with new toys, books, games, underwear, and socks for the more than 600 children who our Epiphany elves help to make Christmas a happy and joyful time. These items should be unwrapped and placed in the designated fellowship hall area.

I never take this project for granted, but am always overwhelmed with the love and generosity that flows from Epiphany to these faraway mountains.

Peace and Joy,  
Kathleen Tucker



WELCA's General Meeting was held on Sunday, September 24th. There were approximately 30 people in attendance. Our speaker was Quinn Rizzo from Lutheran Services Carolinas. She shared information about how Epiphany can become involved in the New Americans program. WELCA has assembled eight Welcome Kits so far to help with refugee resettlement. These will be added to the kits the congregation will assemble on October 1.

We invite the congregation to join us in collecting socks for The Dwelling from October 15-31. These should be new socks of all sizes for men, women, and children. There will be a box in the narthex for the socks.

### Dates:

*October 10- Mary Martha circle meets in the fellowship hall at 10 am*

*October 10- Dorothy circle meets at the church at 7 pm*

*October 12- Nora Deal circle meets in the fellowship hall at 11:30 am*

## Fellowship

### Date Change to November 12

We really enjoyed our last brunch at Sander's Ridge and had requests to have another one. So, mark your calendars for **Sunday, November 12th**. We've made reservations at **JOLO Winery and Vineyards with Restaurant** located at 219 Jolo Winery Ln, Pilot Mountain, NC 27041. It's about a 30-minute drive, so please let me know if you want to carpool.

Their menu is at <https://www.jolovineyards.com/dine>. Please let Jeanie Saphar or Kathy Pressley know if you plan to attend.



Ibrahim Food Pantry is open for this school year! Sign up for a "shift"... No experience necessary. Some light lifting is required.

[Ibrahim Food Pantry](#)

See Jackie or Jim Pierson if you have any questions.



Epiphany brothers and sisters: Your congregational council has continued our regular meetings and activities to support all of the wonderful things happening in the church. The financial picture remains healthy, and the waning days of the summer season have brought a lot of

resumed activity, including Encounter Faith on Sundays as well as Youth Ministry events, Campus Ministry activities at WFU, and plenty of outreach ministry and parish life activity throughout the church and around the area! In this same spirit, all of the ministry committees are busy and starting to formulate budget requests for the coming year. Looking ahead, the fall season certainly holds great promise as well, with great events planned for members and families all around.

The initial stages of the Capital Campaign continue to be a significant consideration, and we are very grateful for all of the members of the church who are leading many different aspects. The events that have already been planned promise to be great opportunities to prayerfully reflect on the opportunities ahead for Epiphany. Be sure to read your weekly emails and Star newsletters closely for all such opportunities in the coming weeks and months.

When we gathered as a Council in September, our devotions centered on some of the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer during the time of his imprisonment and eventual death in Germany as a result of his Nazi resistance activities. Bonhoeffer's writings helped us to reflect on the ways in which God is present with us in the fullness of our lives and all throughout creation, and not just where we or others may expect God to be. Through Christ, God participates in the fullness of human life, and is with us always.



**Next meeting: October 18, 2023,  
1:30 pm  
Fellowship Hall**



We recently lost a special friend and co-worker from the EECC family. Ms. AJ is the aunt of Cynthia Jeffries, our EECC assistant director. She passed away on September 8<sup>th</sup> after a brief illness.



I first met Ms. AJ in the late 90's while working as the Director of the First Baptist Children's Center. Ms. AJ had recently retired from the phone company and moved to the area to be close to Ms, Cynthia. She may have left the phone company but she was NOT ready to sit back and watch life pass her by! I knew right away she would be a great asset, so a position in our program was created for her in the field of early childhood education! I was not disappointed! She brought professionalism and grace to the workplace. It was not long until her co-workers and friends became a growing part of a wider circle of extended family in this community. Many of the connections she made with families have continued, as children have become young adults. Families have kept in touch and shared memories of how important Ms. AJ was to the lives of their children. She was always caring, gentle and wise. Parents recall the calm supportive nature of Ms. AJ as they handed her their infants, and left them in her capable hands. She gave her students and families a second home in her heart and it showed.

When First Baptist closed, Ms. AJ came to Epiphany to support our team. Families that were displaced by the closure were comforted by her presence at Epiphany! In the summer we expand our services to include a large summer camp. "Grandma" AJ, as she was fondly called, worked with Emma Wester making our PALS camp a huge success. Her co-workers at Epiphany also grew to admire and respect her as an important member of our workplace. Even when the bus route schedule was blocks short of our door, it was never a burden for several on staff to provide transportation to ensure she got to where she needed to go. Sharing time with her one-on-one was a gift.

We will truly miss Ms. AJ, but our Heavenly Father has left us with the comfort of many wonderful memories, the fellowship of family and friends, and as we learned from Ms. AJ, the light of His presence to lead us for the days ahead.

In His Service,  
Lisa Nichols





Leaves are changing colors, the air is getting cooler, and things are getting spookier, which can only mean one thing -Trunk or Treat is coming soon! Trunk or Treat will be **Sunday, October 29th from 5:00-7:00** in the Pensby Rd. entrance parking lot (beside

the parking circle). Trunk or Treat is an event where children are encouraged to dress in their costumes and visit each participating trunk in our parking lot for a Halloween game or treat! We need lots of trunks for this to be a success and any level of decorating ability is welcome! If you would like to participate in trunk decorating, please visit the bulletin board outside of Pastor Russell's office for sign-up forms or go to <https://forms.gle/SRQt9cx2ASWvvZAh6>. All participating vehicles will enter and exit from the Pensby Rd. side and all Trunk or Treat visitors will enter from the Pennington Rd. side. Email Lauren Saldaña ([lsaldana@epiphanyws.org](mailto:lsaldana@epiphanyws.org)) with any questions or a digital copy of the trunk sign-up form.



There will be **no Encounter: Faith** on **Sunday, October 15th** for a fall break.



If you would like to participate in one of the fall weekends at Lutheridge or Lutherock, please go ahead and register on their websites. Spaces fill up quickly and we'd love to have you there! Epiphany has scholarships available for anyone who would like to attend. It is sure to be an awe inspiring time in the mountains of NC during leaf-peeping season!



### PROGRAM INFO

YOUTH & ADULT

#### Dates

October 6-8, 2023

#### Cost

Weekend Stay: \$100 Adult,  
\$60 Youth age 3+

Saturday Only: \$35 per person

Sky Park Ropes Course: \$40  
per person (Optional Add-On)

[https://lutherock.org/fall\\_spring\\_programs/harvest-festival-weekend/](https://lutherock.org/fall_spring_programs/harvest-festival-weekend/)



### PROGRAM INFO

ALL

#### Dates

October 13-15, 2023

#### Cost

\$200 1st Adult

\$50 2nd Adult

\$10 Per Child

\$80 extra room

[https://lutheridge.org/fall\\_spring\\_programs/fall-family-fun/](https://lutheridge.org/fall_spring_programs/fall-family-fun/)



In order to access a "pictorial directory" online, you will need to accept an invitation to Realm. You should receive this invitation by the end of October.

Realm is the database we use in the office. By accepting the invitation, you will be able to look up members' contact information and make changes to your own contact information. However, if you do make changes, please notify the office at [epiphanystaff@epiphanyws.org](mailto:epiphanystaff@epiphanyws.org) or 336-765-6211.

If you have not submitted a picture for the directory, please email it to Mickey at the above email address. It really helps to have pictures so that new people can be able to become acquainted with the congregation. Your help is appreciated.

We are in need of October and November meals for about five LSM students. If you can help, please sign up at [Lutheran Church of the Epiphany: Campus Ministry Meals spring semester \(signupgenius.com\)](http://Lutheran Church of the Epiphany: Campus Ministry Meals spring semester (signupgenius.com))



## Festival de la Herencia Hispana

All are welcome to Christ's Beloved, Winston-Salem's first **Latin Festival** organized by the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina and the Latino Ministry Office. They hope to have you and other members of the synod with them on **Saturday, October 7**, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. "All are welcome to taste our food and our culture."

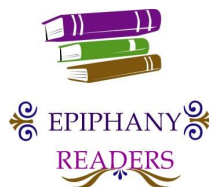
[Watch "That All May Be Fed," a short film about Christ's Beloved.](#)



Everyone is invited to a *Spooktacular Brunch* on Sunday, October 29th right after worship. Please bring your favorite treat to share but don't make it too scary!

A special punch is being brewed up for friendly ghosts and goblins to enjoy!

The Epiphany Readers' next meeting by Zoom will be at 7pm on Thursday, October 26th. The book that will be discussed in October is *How the Word is Passed* by Clint Smith. All are welcome to join in the discussion.



## For Our Neighbors

Good and gracious God, you invite us to recognize and reverence your divine image and likeness in our neighbor. Enable us to see the reality of racism and free us to challenge and uproot it from our society, our world, and ourselves. Amen.

*(a prayer from All Creation Sings)*

To Join Zoom Meeting:  
<https://bit.ly/EpiphanyReaders>

If you have milestones to celebrate, please contact Mickey Miller.



# Our Epiphany Family

Help us keep our prayer list current by letting us know if there are those who need to be included.



We did enjoy seeing the photo of Marty (Wylie) and what she wrote. Bill and I feel the same way about Epiphany and miss all our friends there. It has been very stressful and hard to move for us as well, but it was time to make a change and we are adjusting among many unopened boxes.

Epiphany Church is a strong mission church that serves the world, community, and its family and we felt privileged to have been a part of its discipleship for many years.

With fond memories,  
Lillian & Bill Flichman



From Senior Services Annual Report

### Ministers, All the People of Epiphany

**Pastor,** Pastor Russell Peek

Email: [pastorrussell@epiphanyws.org](mailto:pastorrussell@epiphanyws.org)

**Director of Music,** Patryck Nuss

E-mail: [music@epiphanyws.org](mailto:music@epiphanyws.org)

**Director of Youth & Campus Ministry,** Liz Dinkins

E-mail: [ldinkins@epiphanyws.org](mailto:ldinkins@epiphanyws.org)

**Director of Children's Ministries,** Lauren Saldaña

E-mail: [lsaldana@epiphanyws.org](mailto:lsaldana@epiphanyws.org)

**Early Childhood Center Director,** Lisa Nichols

E-mail: [lisanichols@epiphanyws.org](mailto:lisanichols@epiphanyws.org), 336-768-2140

**Office Manager & Financial Secretary,** Mickey Miller

E-mail: [epiphanystaff@epiphanyws.org](mailto:epiphanystaff@epiphanyws.org)

**Monthly STAR Newsletter Editor,**

E-mail: [epiphanystaff@epiphanyws.org](mailto:epiphanystaff@epiphanyws.org)

**Epiphany - Phone:** 336-765-6211 **Fax:** 336-765-1754

**Epiphany E-mail:** [epiphanystaff@epiphanyws.org](mailto:epiphanystaff@epiphanyws.org)

**Web Site:** [www.epiphanyws.org](http://www.epiphanyws.org)

## Jim Lippard Honored by Lutheran Services Carolinas

Epiphany's own, Jim Lippard, was honored at a special dinner on September 25 at Trinity Glen in Winston-Salem. Jim has worked faithfully in supporting Lutheran Services Carolinas, including being the driving force for Lippard Lodge in Clemmons, which provides care for adults with Traumatic and Acquired Brain Injuries.

At the dinner, Jim was surrounded by family, friends, and representatives from Epiphany as he was called a pioneer and tireless advocate for adults with brain injuries. The people that gave testimonies about Jim's impact talked about his unwavering commitment and selfless contributions. Because of his work, Lippard Lodge, the first care home of its kind in the Triad, provides growth, independence, and joy for its residents.

Congratulations to Jim and thanks be to God for Epiphany's continued partnership with Lutheran Services Carolinas!

### GIFT OF THE MONTH ITEMS FOR OCTOBER

**CRISIS CONTROL MINISTRY** - Applesauce (please no glass jars), saltine crackers

**SAMARITAN MINISTRIES** - Ground coffee (regular), hand lotion (sample size), socks, razors, high efficiency laundry detergent packs/pods

**RONALD McDONALD HOUSE** - Paper towels; 13-gallon trash bags; individual snacks & drinks; <https://rmhcpt.org/make-a-difference/wish-list/>

**TRINITY GLEN** - Soap

**TRINITY ELMS** - Fronts of greeting cards, baby lotion, body wash, bath items, deodorant, snacks, note cards

**CBC FOOD PANTRY** - Volunteers to take food donations from church to CBC and to work stocking shelves/distributing food twice a month

**EECC** - Cheerios, raisins, applesauce (individual, plain)

**IBRAHAM FOOD PANTRY** - Diapers/pullups sizes 2-6

### 2023 Congregation Council

#### Officers:

Chris Schultz, Pres.

Betty Benardo, VP

Terry Wiley, Treas.

Mark Tellefsen, Sec.

#### Non-Council Officers:

Mickey Miller, Fin. Sec.

Jackie Pierson, Asst. Tr. Payroll

#### Members:

Patti Deal

Matt Imboden

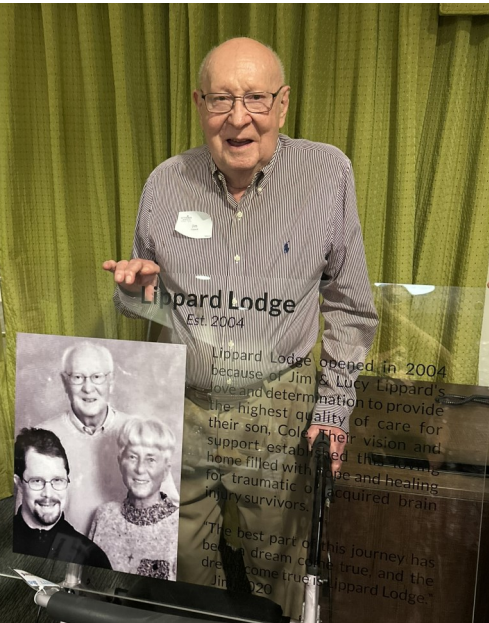
Sarah Lischer

Dan Meckley

Diana Stindt

Pastor Russell Peek





Epiphany members celebrate Jim Lippard



Food Pantry Folks: (back row) Susan & Mark Tellefsen, (front row) Janet Hardy, Jackie & Jim Pierson



Nora, Virginia



*"If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."*  
*John 14:14, NRSV*

**LET US PRAY FOR...**

**Leaders of church & state, especially**

|                                   |                            |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Our Congregation Council</i>   | <i>Pastor Russell Peek</i> |
| <i>Christ's Beloved Community</i> | <i>President Joe Biden</i> |
| <i>Bishop Elizabeth Eaton</i>     | <i>Governor Roy Cooper</i> |
| <i>Bishop Timothy Smith</i>       | <i>Mayor Allen Joines</i>  |

*All victims of war and any form of violence*

**Our sister congregations and our missionary in Mexico**

*Fr. Javier Arias and the people of Christ's Beloved Community*  
*Pr. David Brondos and the Theological Community of Mexico*  
*The people of Mupini Parish, Namibia*

**Active duty military personnel, especially**

*Travis Gerdes*  
*Randal Middleton*  
*David Schultz*

**For those who rejoice, especially**

**Family & friends of the congregation in need, especially**

|                                 |                               |                          |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Judy Allison</i>             | <i>Pam Holcomb</i>            | <i>Karen Rose</i>        |
| <i>Ashley Blackburn</i>         | <i>Robin Hoots</i>            | <i>Shelly Saldaña</i>    |
| <i>Thomas &amp; Mary Cannon</i> | <i>David Howard</i>           | <i>Nora Schweitzer</i>   |
| <i>Clark Family</i>             | <i>Jean Jarvis</i>            | <i>Liz Shumate</i>       |
| <i>Rose Debruhl</i>             | <i>Katie Lippard</i>          | <i>Sue Slezak</i>        |
| <i>Paul DeJute</i>              | <i>Chad Marion</i>            | <i>Michele Stanfield</i> |
| <i>Sylvia Ann Derrick</i>       | <i>Linda McKenna</i>          | <i>JP Swanson</i>        |
| <i>Carl Dubose</i>              | <i>Terry McKinney</i>         | <i>Stephanie Taylor</i>  |
| <i>Howard Flichman</i>          | <i>Stacey Morgan</i>          | <i>Laura Turlington</i>  |
| <i>Tara-Lynn Flick</i>          | <i>Allison Morris</i>         | <i>Alan Vestal</i>       |
| <i>Pat &amp; Joanne Gill</i>    | <i>Kirsten Nuss</i>           | <i>Emma Wester</i>       |
| <i>Jonathan Gomez</i>           | <i>Annette Pardue</i>         | <i>Lynn Wiemann</i>      |
| <i>Carolyn Graham</i>           | <i>Robert &amp; Mary Peak</i> | <i>Nicole Williams</i>   |
| <i>Linda Grale</i>              | <i>Andy Powless</i>           | <i>John Wooding</i>      |
| <i>Becky Hartsook</i>           | <i>Steve Reno</i>             | <i>Leigh Yarner</i>      |

**Members in need, especially**

|                           |                    |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>The Rev. John Beeg</i> | <i>Chad Kraft</i>  |
| <i>Sharen Bond</i>        | <i>Jim Lippard</i> |
| <i>Ann Cannon</i>         | <i>Jean Mock</i>   |
| <i>Julianne Golden</i>    | <i>Wanda Rabb</i>  |

**Our Christian love and sympathy to the family and friends of**

*AJ Devan*  
*Sherry Dube*  
*Doris Downing*  
*Earl Taylor*  
*Emma Hemphill*



*Elizabeth Horton, Homestead Hills*  
*Bert Joines, Homestead Hills*  
*Doris Kent, Forsyth Court*  
*Sue Muhler, Brookdale Senior Living*  
*Carl Schlager, The Stratford, High Point*



*Bonnie Bryant*  
*Cole Lippard*  
*Polly Rector*

*Virginia Schmitz*  
*Robert Walker*

**October Birthdays**

|                   |       |
|-------------------|-------|
| Andrew Lichtenhan | 10/1  |
| Keith Queen       | 10/2  |
| Dave Planitzer    | 10/2  |
| Henry Sloop       | 10/2  |
| Jeanie Saphar     | 10/3  |
| Don Witte         | 10/3  |
| Ron Hartzell      | 10/4  |
| Ardel Meisinger   | 10/5  |
| Gus Phillips      | 10/6  |
| Alex Saphar       | 10/6  |
| Betty Benardo     | 10/7  |
| Dan King          | 10/7  |
| Nancy Phipps      | 10/8  |
| Lew Saphar        | 10/15 |
| Sarah Lischer     | 10/16 |
| Christina Kraft   | 10/18 |
| Pat Baker         | 10/23 |
| Darlene Martin    | 10/24 |
| Jane Stribling    | 10/25 |
| Luther Vann       | 10/27 |
| Cheryl Hartzell   | 10/29 |
| Norma Wells       | 10/29 |

**October Baptisms**

|                 |       |
|-----------------|-------|
| Ryan Arens      | 10/1  |
| Matthew Meckley | 10/1  |
| Ryan Davis      | 10/3  |
| Martha Oldland  | 10/3  |
| Scott Pressley  | 10/4  |
| Nancy Cope      | 10/9  |
| Carolyn Wiley   | 10/14 |
| Dave Planitzer  | 10/22 |
| Jessica Reich   | 10/25 |



|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| <i>Dave &amp; Rita Planitzer</i>          | <i>10/2</i>  |
| <i>John &amp; Chelsea Walker</i>          | <i>10/2</i>  |
| <i>Cory &amp; Emily Phillips</i>          | <i>10/5</i>  |
| <i>Stephen Patrick &amp; Sara Kaluzne</i> | <i>10/13</i> |
| <i>Ron &amp; Cheryl Hartzell</i>          | <i>10/22</i> |
| <i>Joe &amp; Ann Cannon</i>               | <i>10/30</i> |

We wish you many more years of happiness!



We received thanks from:  
 The Dwelling

Dear Epiphany Family,

Words are not enough to express the deep, heartfelt appreciation for the cards, calls, and acts of kindness during my surgery and healing. I am doing well and blessed.

Love,  
 Lisa Nichols





## Never Alone

Why? WHY? Anyone with a toddler knows how this question echoes—or anyone who practices science, philosophy, theology, politics, or just relationships in general.

*Why* implies purpose, cause and effect, and meaning. When people don't have answers, as you know, they make things up, sometimes with sincerely good intentions and sometimes to manipulate advantage. We can't ignore "Why?"

Theologically, the *why* question is the great dilemma of Christian faith itself, addressed in the book of Job, Paul's letter to the Romans, and Dostoevsky's epic novel, *The Brothers Karamozov*. We call it *theodicy*. It goes like this:

1. God is all-powerful, sovereign.
2. God is all-benevolent and loving.
3. Bad things, tragic things, unthinkable things, happen.

Philosophically, either God loves us infinitely but can't do anything to stop #3, or God is not all-loving and caring. God **could** change the situation, but God doesn't.

We think we must know. Why? It's why well-meaning people say frankly ridiculous and offensive things at the death of a child in defense of the God who ultimately has to make sense: "Everything happens for a reason." Or "God needed another little flower in the heavenly garden." Excuse me, but I have no use for such a God. And that's **not** the God revealed to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The fact is, siblings, that the deeper a crisis gets—even as our default at tragedy is always "Why?"—the less we need answers and the more we need presence. P-R-E-S-E-N-C-E. The less we need why and how and the more we need *Who*.

When a child cries out in the night with a terrible nightmare, a parent rushes in and pulls the child close. They don't launch into an explanation of why the dream isn't real. It **is** the child's reality in that moment. The parent doesn't explain **why** God for some larger purpose might have sent such a horrific dream. No, the loving parent simply and lovingly holds the child close, enters their trauma, rocks them, and says "It's okay, baby, Momma's here. Daddy's here. I am with you."

Our funeral liturgy has a beautifully honest prayer petition, "Help us in the midst of things we cannot understand, still to believe and trust in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." While answers are helpful in many contexts, they are **not** foundational to human meaning. That was the serpent's lie in the Garden. The forbidden tree was the tree of knowledge of all good and evil. Satan lied, "You'll know everything and then be like God."

God is clear, if not kind, with Job's eventual demand to know why suffering, with the underlying assumption that knowledge is ultimate power and control. God gets downright sarcastic. "Hey, Mr. Job, before I tell you, remind me...where were you when I scattered the stars and filled the oceans and raised up the mountains and set the universe in motion since you demand to know why?" In other words, it's mystery. Or as Isaiah puts it, "God's ways are higher than my ways."

While knowledge is a noble and necessary pursuit, it is not primary. Relationships are. Biblically and experientially speaking, I think we know down in our souls that relationships aren't just primary. They're everything. With God, with one another.

And Jesus comes to us not so much as the one with answers but to be for us, with us, God with skin on, to walk with us through the greatest joy and the deepest suffering, promising us that suffering will not, does not, have the last word. The worst thing is never the last thing. Our cruciform Jesus brings us a faith that hangs on to death and resurrection amid mystery, frustration, anger, emptiness, questions that receive at best a hollow echo in the void of answers as we see through a mirror dimly and yet echoes just as surely, "Nothing will separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus." Presence. "I am with you, until the end of the age." Never alone.

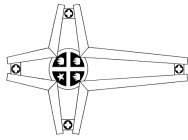
Even in the deepest darkness and emptiness and hopelessness, the God who in Christ enters fully into our deepest suffering in order both fully to know it and fully to overcome it comes to us with skin on, if not with all the answers, surely in presence. Pulls us close, rocks us, comforts us, reminding us, "It's okay. Daddy's here. Momma's with you. Nothing can separate us." Amen.

**Walking with you,**

*Jim*

**NC Synod Bishop**

*This reflection is an adaptation of a devotion I was asked to lead at the Lenoir-Rhyne University Board of Trustees meeting two weeks ago in response to the unexpected death that week of one of our relatively young trustees, the vigil of our new LTSS (Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary) rector and dean with his wife at that time in the last stages of her 11-year journey with cancer, and last week's shooting and death of a professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.*



**Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat**

|  |                                 |  |  |  |  |   |
|--|---------------------------------|--|--|--|--|---|
| 1<br><b>God's Work Our Hands</b><br><b>After Worship</b> Refugee Kits (FH)                     | 2                               | 3<br>11 am Bible Study<br>6 pm LSM<br>6 pm Handbells   | 4<br>10 am EECC Chapel<br>6 pm Choir   | 5<br>10 am EECC Chapel<br>3 pm Staff<br>6 pm Choir<br>6 pm CC Steering Comm. | 6<br>11:30 am Nora Deal Cir.   | 7<br>9 am-noon EECC Workday<br>Lutheridge Family Fall Festival  |
| 8  | 9<br>7 pm Executive Comm.       | 10<br>10 am Mary-Martha Bible Study<br>6 pm LSM<br>6 pm Handbells<br>6:30 pm CC Steering Team<br>7 pm Dorothy Circle | 11<br>10 am EECC Chapel<br>3 pm Staff<br>6 pm Choir<br>6 pm CC Steering Comm.                          | 12<br>11:30 am Nora Deal Cir.  | 13<br>Lutheridge Family Fall Festival thru 10/15                     | 14<br>9 am-noon EECC Workday<br>Lutheridge Family Fall Festival   |
| 15<br>No Encounter:Faith<br>Lutheridge Family Fall Festival                                    | 16<br>7 pm Congregation Council | 17<br>11 am Bible Study<br>6 pm LSM<br>6 pm Handbells  | 18<br>10 am EECC Chapel<br>1:30 pm Widows Might<br>3 pm Staff<br>6 pm Choir                            | 19<br>6 pm Finance   | 20<br>9 am-noon EECC Workday<br>Rain Date<br>10 am Epiphany Quilters | 21<br>9 am-noon EECC Workday<br>Rain Date<br>10 am Epiphany Quilters  |
| 22<br><b>After Worship</b> Building & Grounds Forum (FH)                                       | 23                              | 24<br>11 am Bible Study<br>6 pm LSM<br>6 pm Handbells  | 25<br>EECC Fall Fun Day<br>10 am EECC Chapel<br>3 pm Staff<br>5:30 pm EECC Pot Luck (FH)<br>6 pm Choir | 26<br>7 pm Epiphany Readers  | 27<br>7 pm Epiphany Readers  | 28  |
| 29<br><b>Reformation</b><br><b>After Worship</b> Spook-tacular Brunch<br>5-7 pm Trunk-or-Treat | 30                              | 31<br><b>Halloween</b><br>11 am Bible Study<br>6 pm LSM<br>6 pm Handbells  |  |  |  | Every Sunday<br>9 am Adult Encounter:Faith<br>9 am Encounter:Faith<br>9:30 am Backpack Prep<br>10am Worship |