

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I pray that this finds you healthy and well!

In our house, we rush into the beginning of the school year, wait a week or two, then run into a chaotic collective of Back-to-School Nights, wait a week or two, and then rush into the next thing. In between, we celebrate a birthday, go on adventures, and get homework, housework, projects, and work done. By the time October rolls around, it's easy to forget what happened in August.

Whether your September is like mine or you experience these phenomena elsewhere in the year, the struggle is real. Without realizing it, busyness quickly becomes our business as priorities, patterns, and the places we spend our time all shift away from what grounds us. The relationships around us suffer, our health is at higher risk for illness, and our spirit feels empty because our souls are hungry. These spiritual and relational complacency seasons are easier to justify than resist or break free of.

In Acts 10:9-16 the apostle Peter was praying and received a vision from God that revealed a buffet before him filled with "all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air." As a faithful Jesus-following-Jew (Christians were still considered a sect of Judaism), Peter knew the kosher laws forbade him from eating unclean meat. Yet, God provides these animals for Peter and tells him to "kill and eat," but most aren't kosher. Naturally, Peter refuses twice. On the third time, however, God calls Peter out for his stubbornness and misaligned priorities and tells him: "What God has made clean, do not call common." As the narrative in this passage continues, God leads Peter to the home of a Centurion named Cornelius, whose baptism later in this chapter is among the first of the Gentiles recorded in the book of Acts. In doing so, God turns the apostles and early church's understanding of the Gospel upside down and opens the floodgates for believers of ALL nations, tribes, and tongues to follow Jesus.

As a congregation, ministry can occasionally fall into a pattern of routine complacency that comfortably lulls us through one season into the next. When this happens, the "80/20 Rule" reigns supreme: 20% of LCW's members do at least 80% of the work, and 80% of the financial offerings and giving comes from a max of 20% of God's people at LCW. The impact and effects of complacency are significant in a congregation but FAR FROM IRREVERSIBLE. The shift is subtle, subversive, and slow, leading a once vibrant and active community down a path that turns us inward. This risks looking more like a country club we visit once a week and less like the church God calls to be in Christ.

So, where do WE stand?

- **Financially** - We are behind \$22,224 year-to-date in our annual giving. Otherwise, given current trends, we're projected to end the year about \$34,000 in the red. Likewise, for the second year in a row, we have had to dip into our savings to cover deficits in giving, reducing our reserves by about \$16,000 each year thus far.
- **Attendance** - Seeing so many people return more regularly after COVID has been fantastic. As you may have also noticed, some folks who need an invitation to return home to the Lord's House and know they are missed still need to be added to the fold. Likewise, in looking at our attendance patterns beginning in August 2021, we have

experienced a decline of 6-7% each year since the present. However, engagement through our YouTube channel broadcasting worship has remained steady despite encountering some technical issues that we've overcome. Interestingly, though, when I look at the data behind the average length of viewing time (across the LCW channel) by country, the United States is only #3 of the top 5, with Jamaica (#1) and Ghana (#2) claiming the top spots. Do not ever doubt how broad and expansive the Body of Christ truly is!

- **Outreach** - We have an opportunity to have the Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) offer a presentation on their "Ministry Clarity" program and the benefits that it could potentially have in discovering, establishing, and implementing a solid mission and vision for the ministry God is calling to in Raynham, Taunton, and our surrounding Communities.
- **Opportunity** - Over the summer, I applied to participate in a "Business Skills for Faith-Based Organizations" continuing education program with Concordia University Wisconsin and Ann Arbor (CUWAA), generously sponsored by LCEF. This year-long program will strengthen my leadership skillset and bring deliverables back to LCW that benefit our ministry together. If you're interested in reading up on the descriptions of the topics we'll be covering and what the program looks like, you can visit [learn.cuw.edu](http://learn.cuw.edu). This program will take place online every other Monday or Thursday evening. We'll cover financial management, social media marketing, fundraising, strategy, and change management. After the program next August, the continuing education credits can transfer into an equivalent in Masters Degree level credits that will be 1/3 of the credits I will need to complete an MBA. Of the total number of applicants when LCEF/CUWAA first extended the Synod-wide offer, they only chose 25 to participate in this cohort sponsored by LCEF. I am both surprised and deeply grateful for this opportunity and seek your prayers and support throughout this endeavor. Likewise, I am super excited about how this will be a blessing to our ministry together!
- **Leadership & Service Roles** - We have some open positions as we approach our annual voters' meeting. I ask you to prayerfully consider how God asks you to answer His calls to serve within His church. Likewise, a dedicated group of ushers and altar guild members serve thanklessly each week, but we always need more! There are also opportunities to serve as greeters to welcome folks for worship and help make visitors feel like they have a place to belong. We've come a long way in improving our live stream and sound capability. It makes a huge difference to have extra hands trained, equipped, and on deck to ensure all is running smoothly without me running back and forth in the middle of worship. Where can you fit into the mix?

In the economies of scale, size matters. A jet-ski can turn much faster than a cruise ship. Obstacles and hard words can bear both Law and Gospel and be a blessing and a curse. Without a doubt, we have work to do and room to grow. But! We have a blank canvas of possibility set before us. Navigating this uncharted territory together is a grand adventure, finding ways to minister to our communities, some familiar and well-trodden, while others are unconventional and brand new. God freed the apostle Peter from his complacency by calling him to follow His Word and Promise out of his comfort zone. Friends, ministry at Lutheran Church of the Way is changing. God is on the move, and I am excited for this season of life together!

I look forward to seeing you in worship! God's blessings!

In His hands,  
Pastor Jake

(P.S. The delay in this month's newsletter is solely my fault. My apologies for the tardiness as I wanted to be sure I had my numbers and figures correct and current before sharing them. Thank you for your grace and understanding.)