God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. I John 4:16

God is Love

I can’t help myself—talking about “love” during the month of Valentine’s Day. I made the comment the other day in a gathering of friends that “Valentine’s Day is a day of obligation.” I got what I expected—a barrage of “boo’s” from the female delegation.

But what of it? Not only Valentine’s Day—but every day—isn’t love an obligation? Isn’t it a duty or commitment expected of us? Aren’t we morally bound to love? Doesn’t God command us to love? “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church” (Eph. 5:25). “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 19:19). “Love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44). The Law does its work, doesn’t it!? It accuses us. We have not loved our wives, our neighbor, or our enemies as we are commanded to.

But is Christian love really an obligation? I’ve been reading a lot of Luther lately about faith—especially how he preaches faith. It is amazing how many times Luther links faith and love; faith and good works. “When this faith is first present, and purification has been accomplished through Christ Himself, then we can do good works, hate and regret sins, and then the works are good. But before faith, they are good for nothing and produce only false confidence and trust” (AE 75:267).

Pastors and pastor’s wives struggle with ‘love’ just like everyone else—loving each other, loving congregational members, and loving those who are not so nice to us at times. Often, it’s downright difficult to love, and especially as a pastor and pastor’s wife, we feel especially guilty when we don’t love.

Go back to Luther, “When this faith is first present, and purification has been accomplished through Christ Himself.” Dear brother and sister in Christ, you are pure in the blood of Jesus Christ. This ‘faith’ He gives you is the full, free, forgiveness of sins. You are His beloved—not because you are so loveable, but because God is love! You are His beloved because He shed His precious blood for you, washed you in it, and claims you, a sinner, for His own and His eternal kingdom.

Now—we do not love out of obligation; we love because of who we are—a people loved by God in whom He abides. Now I’m on my way to buy roses for my wife for Valentine’s Day. My new man will buy them because Christ lives in me.

In Christ,

Jim
Rev. Dr. James Baneck, Executive Director of Pastoral Education
Exciting News from the PALS Field

**Rocky Mountain District PALS Group Enjoys Winter Retreat!**

PALS pastors and their wives enjoyed a warm gathering during the chilly month of January—thank you Pastor David and Ginny Vanderhyde!

**Iowa District West PALS Gathering**

Pastor Duncan and Alissa McLellan gathering their group together in a retreat setting for time in study, worship, casuistry and fellowship! Pastor’s children also enjoyed time to learn, grow, and be together!

**Kansas District PALS Active During Winter Months**

Pastor Timothy and Susanna Heath enjoyed time with their PALS families during the months of December and February. What a wonderful time for growth, encouragement, and fellowship during the often-bleary winter months!

**Missouri District PALS Event**

PALS facilitators Pastor Wayne and Crystal Huebner shared the following news from their recent PALS event.

“The Missouri District (East) PALS group met February 1-2, 2019 at the Airport Hilton St. Louis and Salem Lutheran Church and School, Affton. The theme was *The LCMS Call Process, the Pastor, and His Family.* 15 participants were in attendance. In addition to worship, prayer, and fellowship, the group learned about how the
Divine Call is understood and practiced in our Synod on the basis of the Scriptures and Confessions. Today the interview, call, and evaluation process as it is carried out within congregations can lead to questions, uncertainty, and even anxiety within the pastor’s family. Guest presenters were Mr. Blake Rundell of Christ Memorial Lutheran Church and Pastor David Gruenwald of the Lutheran Church of the Resurrection, both in St. Louis. Mr. Rundell offered a layman’s perspective on the call process, spelling out what congregations seek in their pastors and how the process of identifying candidates works. Pastor Gruenwald recently accepted a call to Resurrection and talked about how he and his family deliberated and prayed before making their decision. He also shared the joys and sorrows of moving cross country from one congregation and city to another. Both Mr. Rundell and Pastor Gruenwald offered encouragement and appreciation for the young pastors and families who are part of PALS. The PALS families even received mock “call papers” to evaluate. They were eager participants in the discussion, realizing that it is only a matter of time until many of them are contacted by calling congregations and wrestle in prayer with decisions on calls. “

One of the comments we received from a PALS wife in the Huebner’s group—“This was the BEST PALS meeting I’ve attended yet. It was phenomenal!” We appreciate the time it takes for all our facilitators to plan, prepare, and lead these incredible events for our new pastors and their families!

PALS Facilitator Training Event: June 25-26, 2019

ALL Facilitators, new and veteran, mark your calendars! This annual training event is an opportunity for us to strengthen our program by encouraging and equipping our facilitators for joyful service to our new pastors, their families, and the congregations they serve.

We welcome Wyoming District President John Hill and his wife Angela to our training event. He will lead us through a study using the theme: “Joy:FULLY Serving Under the Cross.”

PALS Facilitating couples will receive registration information and conference agenda in the coming weeks. PALS funds the conference and all travel expenses.

Since its inception in 2008, DOXOLOGY: The Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care and Counsel, a recognized service organization of the LCMS, has served well over 700 pastors and the congregations and agencies they serve. The classic DOXOLOGY program includes three separate conference retreats — totaling ten days of training for pastors in advanced soul care skills, three days of training for laity in how they can facilitate a climate of healthy relationships in their congregations, and three days of enrichment and encouragement for pastors’ wives. To learn more and to register, visit DOXOLOGY’s website today. (www.doxology.us)
Joined Together

Circuit Gatherings

As you know, the Missouri Synod operates on a three-year cycle (triennium). Year 1 is the Synod Convention, Year 2 is the Circuit Convocation, and Year 3 is the District Convention.

The Circuit Convocation (Bylaw 5.4) takes place in the non-convention year. It is designed to be a circuit gathering with an emphasis on inspiration, education, motivation, and mission and theological discourse. It’s meant to celebrate and plan for the mission and ministry of the circuit.

The Circuit Forum (5.3) is a gathering of the circuit where learning and information is shared. It is also the gathering where the circuit elects its circuit visitor; participates in the triennial process of suggesting, developing, and attaining Synod’s priorities and goals; and may submit overtures to national and district conventions. Electoral Circuits (3.1.2) meet to elect circuit voting delegates to the Synod’s national conventions.

Connections

From Rev. Richard Snow, President, Nebraska District

The transition from Seminary classwork and community to church work and new relationships is a challenge that few of us consider much less comprehend. PALS provides the space and place for our new men and their families to process and adapt to their new calling and way of life. I am grateful for the training, support, and curriculum that PALS gives to the workers, families, facilitators, congregations, and district of Nebraska.

Did You Know

A $1,000 Investment

The Church is very committed in investing in the formation of her pastors – pre-seminary, seminary, and post-seminary. Just for PALS - the District pays $500 per year for every participating PALS pastor. The Synod (through the submitted offerings of our people) matches $500 per pastor. That means the Church invests $1,000 into every PALS pastor every year. On the average, there are 200 pastors participating in PALS each year. This means the Church invests approx. $200,000 per year in the formation of her pastors in PALS alone.