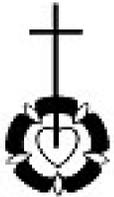




Faith Country
Shared Ministry

Faith Country Chronicle
December 2015



SYNOD OF
ALBERTA
AND THE
TERRITORIES

December 2015 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ –

I thank my God every time I remember you... (Philippians 1:3).

I have heard from many rostered leaders that their congregation, council, or small group has been using the 2015 monthly articles for shared learning, discernment and reflection together. It is my intent to continue this practice in 2016 with the article forwarded mid-month via our synod e-list and available on the synod website. In 2016 I will be focusing on themes of Practicing Our Faith.

Throughout this year I invited you to reflect on portions of Paul’s letter, *to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi (1:1b)*, as you gathered for church council, adult study, youth group, coffee group and were engaged in learning, discernment and reflection together. Relying heavily on the writings of Fred Craddock and of David Lose, each article included a brief reflection on a Scripture passage, questions for reflection and discussion, and a prayer. I encourage you, now as the year concludes, to read Paul’s letter again in its entirety in one sitting; remembering as you read that this is a letter – of Paul – to a church.

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Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The friends who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of the emperor’s household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Philippians 4:21-23

And then it’s over. Paul’s letter ends with the traditional two-fold pattern common to ancient correspondence: greetings to all from all, and a benediction.

Except it’s not really over. At this point Paul doesn’t know what his fate will be. He longs to see the Philippians again but has no assurance of that. He hopes to continue his work but is resigned – no, not really resigned but actually quite confident – that whether he lives or dies, Christ will be glorified.

And so while his conclusion is traditional, it is also both personal and imperative. Greet every saint – that is, each and every individual member – in the Philippian congregation for me, he writes. And know that these greetings come not only from me but from friends and associates with me and, indeed, from other Christians even here in this Roman outpost where I am imprisoned.

Paul may not only be conveying a wealth of greetings, reminding the Philippians of the many fellow believers with whom they are bound, but also emphasizing that he is not alone. He has other associates and friends caring for him and, more than that, who will carry on should he return to the Lord in death. Paul is not alone any more than the Philippians are alone, and together they will see the mission of God to love and reconcile the world advanced. For while Paul’s witness may burn brighter than most, yet it is only one of a myriad of witnesses that together light the way forward into the world of God’s love and peace.

With that confidence, Paul ends with a word of benediction that naturally echoes how he began his letter, blessing his

friends with God's grace, grace that leads to a contented and confident peace whatever the future may hold.

Not a bad way to end, when you think of it. Or, for that matter, to begin.

Read and Reflect: Philippians 4:21-23

Discuss and Reflect:

What in this reading leads you to say, "I wonder about...", or, "I noticed..."

Comment on the following: *Paul may not only be conveying a wealth of greetings, reminding the Philippians of the many fellow believers with whom they are bound, but also emphasizing that he is not alone.*

Comment on the following: *...while Paul's witness may burn brighter than most, yet it is only one of a myriad of witnesses that together light the way forward into the world of God's love and peace.*

Pray together: *Gracious God, let your grace enfold us in confidence and peace, that we may face the future knowing that wherever we may go, and whatever may befall us, you are there out ahead, beckoning us forward. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen (Philippians 4:23).

The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

In Christ Jesus - Shalom,
+Larry

The Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer,
Bishop Synod of Alberta and the Territories
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Spirit -Led Leadership - Hope-Filled Discipleship - Innovative Tradition - Collaborative Partnerships

CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SCHEDULE

December 24 - Christmas Eve

7:00 PM - Candlelight Service at Hope, Forestburg

9:30 PM - Eucharist Service at St. John's, Sedgewick

December 25 - Christmas Day

10:30 AM - Communion Service at Trinity, Lougheed



* There will be no services on Sunday December 27

Christmas Day in the Morning

By Pearl S. Buck

He woke suddenly and completely. It was four o'clock, the hour at which his father had always called him to get up and help with the milking. Strange how the habits of his youth clung to him still! Fifty years ago, and his father had been dead for thirty years, and yet he waked at four o'clock in the morning. He had trained himself to turn over and go to sleep, but this morning it was Christmas, he did not try to sleep.

Why did he feel so awake tonight? He slipped back in time, as he did so easily nowadays. He was fifteen years old and still on his father's farm. He loved his father. He had not known it until one day a few days before Christmas, when he had overheard what his father was saying to his mother.

"Mary, I hate to call Rob in the mornings. He's growing so fast and he needs his sleep. If you could see how he sleeps when I go in to wake him up! I wish I could manage alone."

"Well, you can't, Adam." His mother's voice was brisk. "Besides, he isn't a child anymore. It's time he took his turn."

"Yes," his father said slowly. "But I sure do hate to wake him."

When he heard these words, something in him spoke: his father loved him! He had never thought of that before, taking for granted the tie of their blood. Neither his father nor his mother talked about loving their children--they had no time for such things. There was always so much to do on the farm.

Now that he knew his father loved him, there would be no loitering in the mornings and having to be called again. He got up after that, stumbling blindly in his sleep, and pulled on his clothes, his eyes shut, but he got up.

And then on the night before Christmas, that year when he was fifteen, he lay for a few minutes thinking about the next day. They were poor, and most of the excitement was in the turkey they had raised themselves and mince pies his mother made. His sisters sewed presents and his mother and father always bought him something he needed, not only a warm jacket, maybe, but something more, such as a book. And he saved and bought them each something, too.

He wished, that Christmas when he was fifteen, he had a better present for his father. As usual he had gone to the ten-cent store and bought a tie. It had seemed nice enough until he lay thinking the night before Christmas. He looked out of his attic window, the stars were bright.

"Dad," he had once asked when he was a little boy, "What is a stable?"

"It's just a barn," his father had replied, "like ours."

Then Jesus had been born in a barn, and to a barn the shepherds had come...

The thought struck him like a silver dagger. Why should he not give his father a special gift too, out there in the barn? He could get up early, earlier than four o'clock, and he could creep into the barn and get all the milking done. He'd do it alone, milk and clean up, and then when his father went in to start the milking he'd see it all done. And he would know who had done it. He laughed to himself as he gazed at the stars. It was what he would do, and he mustn't sleep too sound.

He must have waked twenty times, scratching a match to look each time to look at his old watch -- midnight, and half past one, and then two o'clock.

At a quarter to three he got up and put on his clothes. He crept downstairs, careful of the creaky boards, and let himself out. The cows looked at him, sleepy and surprised. It was early for them, too.

He had never milked all alone before, but it seemed almost easy. He kept thinking about his father's surprise. His father would come in and get him, saying that he



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Web: www.fcsm.ca

Email: pastor@fcsm.ca

would get things started while Rob was getting dressed. He'd go to the barn, open the door, and then he'd go get the two big empty milk cans. But they wouldn't be waiting or empty, they'd be standing in the milk-house, filled.

"What the--," he could hear his father exclaiming.

He smiled and milked steadily, two strong streams rushing into the pail, frothing and fragrant.

The task went more easily than he had ever known it to go before. Milking for once was not a chore. It was something else, a gift to his father who loved him. He finished, the two milk cans were full, and he covered them and closed the milk-house door carefully, making sure of the latch.

Back in his room he had only a minute to pull off his clothes in the darkness and jump into bed, for he heard his father up. He put the covers over his head to silence his quick breathing. The door opened.

"Rob!" His father called. "We have to get up, son, even if it is Christmas."

"Aw-right," he said sleepily.

The door closed and he lay still, laughing to himself. In just a few minutes his father would know. His dancing heart was ready to jump from his body.

The minutes were endless -- ten, fifteen, he did not know how many -- and he heard his father's footsteps again. The door opened and he lay still.

"Rob!"

"Yes, Dad--"

His father was laughing, a queer sobbing sort of laugh.

"Thought you'd fool me, did you?" His father was standing by his bed, feeling for him, pulling away the cover.

"It's for Christmas, Dad!"

He found his father and clutched him in a great hug. He felt his father's arms go around him. It was dark and they could not see each other's faces.

"Son, I thank you. Nobody ever did a nicer thing--"

"Oh, Dad, I want you to know -- I do want to be god!" The words broke from him of their own will. He did not know what to say. His heart was bursting with love.

He got up and pulled on his clothes again and they went down to the Christmas tree. Oh what a Christmas, and how his heart had nearly burst again with shyness and pride as his father told his mother and made the younger children listen about how he, Rob, had got up all by himself.

"The best Christmas gift I ever had, and I'll remember it, son every year on Christmas morning, so long as I live."

They had both remembered it, and now that his father was dead, he remembered it alone: that blessed Christmas dawn when, alone with the cows in the barn, he had made his first gift of true love.

This Christmas he wanted to write a card to his wife and tell her how much he loved her, it had been a long time since he had really told her, although he loved her in a very special way, much more than he ever had when they were young. He had been fortunate that she had loved him. Ah, that was the true joy of life, the ability to love. Love was still alive in him, it still was.

It occurred to him suddenly that it was alive because long ago it had been born in him when he knew his father loved him. That was it: Love alone could awaken love. And he could give the gift again and again. This morning, this blessed Christmas morning, he would give it to his beloved wife. He could write it down in a letter for her to read and keep forever. He went to his desk and began his love letter to his wife: My dearest love...

Such a happy, happy Christmas!



Faith Country Shared Ministry

~ December 2015 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 11:30a Killam Pastoral Care Meeting	2 7:30p Animate Study Session -Service The Needs Right Around You @ Bethania	3	4	5
6 9:30a Trinity Communion Service 11:15a Bethania Communion Service 5p Hope Christmas Dinner	7	8	9 7p Hope Council meets	10 10a Galahad Health Centre Service	11	12
13 9:15a Hope Communion Service 11:15a St. John's Lessons and Carols Service	14	15 11a Lutheran Cluster Meeting	16 7:30p Animate Study Session -Community An Unexpected Family @ Hope	17	18	19
20 Baptism at Trinity 9:30a Trinity SOW 11:15a Bethania SOW	21	22	23	24 7p Christmas Eve Service at Hope 9:30p Christmas Eve Service at St. John's	25 Christmas 10:30a Christmas Day Service at Trinity	26 Boxing Day
27 No Services in the Shared Ministry	28	29	30 7p Big Knife Villa Service	31	Notes:	
Mark Your Calendar: service start times will change starting January 3, 2016.						



Faith Country Shared Ministry

~ January 2016 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 New Year's Day	2
3 9:15a Bethania Communion Service 11a Trinity Communion Service	4	5 1:30p Hope Worship Committee	6 9:30a Sedgewick Area Worship Committee - Bethania	7 7:30p FCSM Council meets at Bethania	8 5:30p Epiphany feast	9
10 9:15a St. John's Eucharist Service 11:15a Hope Communion Service	11	12	13 7p Hope Council meets	14	15	16
17 9:15a Bethania Song Service 11a Trinity Song Service	18	19 11a Lutheran Cluster Meeting	20	21 10a Galahad Health Centre Service	22	23
24 9:15a St. John's Morning Prayer 11:15a Hope Communion Service	25	26	27	28	29	30
31 10:30a Joint Worship Service & Pot Luck Luncheon at Bethania 3p Worship Service - Killam Health Centre	Notes:					