Tidings of Peace
come grow with us

REIMAGINING FAITHFUL WITNESS

February 2026

TROY TROFTGRUBEN

Deeper understandings – December 2025

Series editor's note: *This article kicks off the 2026 theme for "Deeper understandings": faithful witness in challenging times. In the coming year, various authors will explore what it means for the ELCA, and each of us as Lutherans, to face the headwinds of societal fracture, loneliness and political contention, and to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ that forgives, frees and transforms not only us individually but the whole world. We hope you will be encouraged and empowered to plant your feet firmly on the rock of our faith and speak joyfully and hopefully about the power of the gospel to foster peace and justice in a world desperately in need of both.*

—Kristin Johnston Largen, president of Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, on behalf of the ELCA's seminaries

These are challenging times for witness to the gospel.

One reason is bad press. There are many negative examples of public imaging and evangelism from certain forms of Christianity—and many of us don't want to be associated with them. In fact, we may be quicker to clarify what our faith is *not about* than what it is *about.* At a gathering of pastors I once attended, there was extensive conversation critiquing existing examples of public witness. When these pastors were asked for more constructive alternatives, there was only silence.

Despite our sour experiences, the call of Jesus to be his witnesses in the world remains. The call is not just for "special" Christians.

Nor is it an optional add-on for outgoing people. The call of Christ to bear witness extends to all Christians. It is part of our heritage and DNA as followers of Jesus, whether we realize it or not.

Bearing witness is both broader than evangelism and inclusive of it. Though *evangelism* involves explicit sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ, *witness* may involve this as well as embodying that message through faithful living. Bearing witness involves direct and indirect ways of speaking, sharing and embodying the gospel and how it has changed our lives.

In the opening scene of the book of Acts, just before Jesus ascends, he addresses his followers: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (1:8). At this defining moment, Jesus calls his followers "witnesses"—not preachers or proclaimers, not salespeople or spokespeople. Witnesses. This language implies sharing what they have seen and heard in relation to Jesus. They don't need to memorize and regurgitate stock messaging. They don't need to give grand speeches. Like witnesses in a court of law, they are simply expected to recount what they have seen and heard in relation to Christ.

This call extends to Jesus' followers today—Lutherans included. In a 1522 church postil, Martin Luther suggested that the church is a "mouth house" because it "has and bears the living voice of the gospel."

He wrote: "It is the way of the Gospel and of the New Testament that [the gospel] is to be preached and discussed orally with a living voice. Christ himself wrote nothing, nor did he give command to write, but to preach orally" (*Luther's Works*, Weimar Edition, 10-1-1:48). For Luther, the church was the "house" where the gospel comes to life through the words and witness of its people. As the church, how are we continuing to be a "mouth house" for the gospel today?

To bear witness is to testify to the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed. This may or may not be primarily verbal. It need not be aggressive or insensitive. It ought not be manipulative or coercive. It does not try to control the results. It leads with humility, not assumptions of superiority. And it begins most faithfully by taking people, their stories and their experiences seriously.

Contrary to conventional ideas, no one-size-fits-all formula exists for faithful Christian witness. It can take shape in a wide variety of ways. In fact, in a world filled with religious messaging and harmful experiences of religious movements, faithful Christian witness *needs* to take shape in diverse ways.

In Acts, the early church's witness did not simply happen through speeches. It also took shape through sharing resources, tending to immediate needs, and extending healing and restoration in Jesus' name (2:42-47; 4:32-37; 9:32-43; 11:27-30). Followers of Jesus engaged other people not as things to be fixed but as conversation partners, deep thinkers and potential equals in a new community (8:26-40; 10:1-48; 17:16-34).

Early Christian believers bore witness in private and public spaces, as individuals and as communities, among people nearby and far away. Most important, this witness was not a program or project of human ingenuity; it was a work of the Holy Spirit in which people joined. As Justo L. Gonzalez wrote in *The Story Luke Tells: Luke's Unique Witness to the Gospel* (Eerdmans, 2015), "the purpose of the outpouring of the Spirit [in Acts] is not to know the hidden secrets of God, but rather to give witness to Jesus."

In Scripture and today, faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ leads with listening, sensitivity, appropriate humility, authenticity and a boldness inspired by the Holy Spirit. Faithful witness involves being a "mouth house" that builds bridges instead of dividing walls, taking people and their experiences seriously. Faithful witness, finally, is part of our Christian and Lutheran heritage—whether or not we always excel at it.

After all, the God who through Christ has invited us to be witnesses will, through the Holy Spirit, prove faithful in, with and around our efforts.

TROY TROFTGRUBEN
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DATES TO REMEMBER

Jersey Sunday: February 8th

Ash Wednesday Service at St. John's: February 18th

Noisy Bucket Offering: February 22nd

Articles Due for March Tidings: February 23rd

Men's Breakfast

We will meet at the Eaton Place for breakfast and fellowship on… **Thursday, February 12th at 8:30am.**
Hope to see you there!

Men's Night Out

We will meet for dinner and fellowship on **Tuesday, February 24th at 6:00 pm**

Ladies Luncheon

Wednesday, February 18th
11:30 am at Evelyn Bay

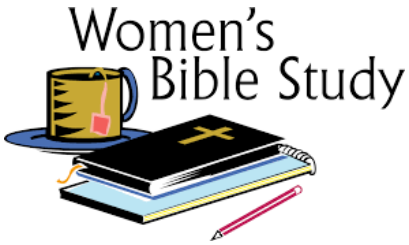
Jersey Sunday

Sunday, February 8th is Super Bowl Sunday. In the Spirit of the Super Bowl Peace is planning a "Jersey Sunday". Plan to wear your favorite team (high school, college, pro) *team jersey* or *team colors*. We will be hosting a "TailGate" Gathering.

Please plan to stay and tailgate with Peace.
Invite your friends and family.

Ash Wednesday is February 18th. We have been invited to join our friends at St. John's Episcopal for this service as we did last year.

Lenten midweek soup suppers and Bible study will be on **Thursdays** again this year beginning on **Thursday, February 26, 2026 at 5:30.** There will be a sign-up sheet in the gathering area where you can sign up to bring soup or bread or dessert. We'd like one vegetarian soup and one non-vegetarian soup if possible. As always, coffee or tea will be provided. Any questions, ask anyone on the Worship team. Looking forward to our time together to enjoy fellowship and Bible study.



WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

The next Women's Bible Study meeting is **February 14th at 10:30 am.**

For more details contact Sandy Hassen.

The Pregnancy Center

The center has a specific need for size 4 and 5 diapers. Please place your donation in the basket in the Gathering Area.

Follow Peace Lutheran Now on Instagram!

Find and follow using this QR code or search @peacecharlottemi.

Poinsettias for Hunger Update

We would like to thank all who participated in our Poinsettias for Hunger donation during Christmas. Your generosity is GREATLY APPRECIATED. We were able to donate to ELCA's Good Gifts for the following: 2 sets of 10 chicks which will grow to provide eggs for a family, 2 roosters that will help produce more chicks, 2 goats that can provide milk and cheese for a family, ½ of a cow which will also provide milk and cheese and fertilizer for crops, 2 piglets which also provides fertilizer for crops and if needed can be sold in case of an emergency, and we were also able to give an ELCA congregation the funds to serve 20 people a meal at a feeding ministry. Your ornaments decorated our Christmas tree but they did so much more. Thank you.

CRAFT AND VENDOR SHOW

Peace Lutheran Church will host its first Craft and Vendor Show on **May 1 and 2, 2026**, the weekend prior to Mother's Day. The crafter and vendor booths will be located in the Gathering Area, youth room, nursery, class room and the narthex. PLC will have a bake sale and a succulent plant sale and perhaps a couple of items available for a drawing. Funds from the booth fees as well as PLC sales will go toward the mortgage reduction with 10% going to a local charity. Applications were handed out to crafters at the Frontier Days Craft Show in September and the Holiday Market in Charlotte in December. We will also be handing out more applications at the Olivet FFA Craft and Farm Toy Show on March 29. We have room for 25-30 booth spaces and hope to fill all spaces. Applications have already started coming in.

When it gets closer to show time, the Committee will be requesting your support to:

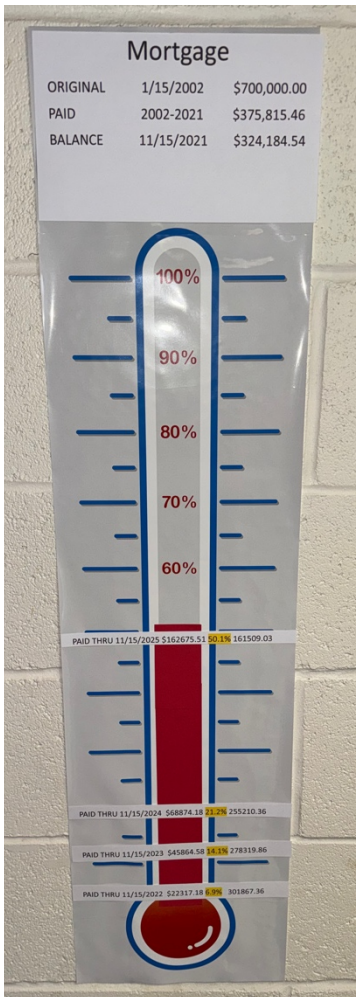
1) provide baked goods, candies, etc. and
2) volunteer to help on the days of the event.

If you know of any crafter that would be interested in renting a booth space, an application can be picked up from the PLC office or by contacting Bev Cahill 352-446-1560 or bevcahill2@gmail.com.

Serve God and Others in Worship

Each week it takes many of God's people working together to make worship happen-and there is a place for you! Join the ministry of worship by serving as an usher, reader, worship assistant or serve on the altar guild. You may want to be a Gathering Host. **Sign up sheets are located in the Gathering Area.** You are welcome to join any of the teams at Peace. The teams are the Caring Team, Community in Action Team, Finance Team, Growing in Faith Team, Personnel/IT Team, Property Team and the Worship Team. Please contact the office if you are interested in this ministry.

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS??



This thermometer is a visual look at the church mortgage. The original mortgage was in January of 2002 for the construction of the new sanctuary, pastor's office, narthex and bathrooms as an addition to the existing building. The mortgage was for $700,000. It took almost 20 years to pay the first half of the mortgage. In November of 2021 the remaining balance of $324,000 was refinanced for 15 years with a 5 year balloon payment due in November of 2026.

The balance as of December 2025 is $155,000. This huge reduction in the balance was accomplished by several large one-time payments on the principal along with some members of the congregation also making monthly or annual donations toward the principal. With the current vacancy of a pastor, it was decided to use some of the funds which would be used to pay a pastor to help reduce the balance even further. The mortgage will be reviewed with the bank in the second half of 2026 for any changes needed for the remaining 10 years on the mortgage. The more we can reduce the balance before this review the better position we will be in.

VISITATION MINISTRY

The Caring Team is asking for help with a Visitation Ministry in reaching out to our members. We need volunteers to visit people in the congregation that have difficulty in getting to church on a regular basis. Visitors would go out in teams of two and would be making one visit per month. Each month you would be visiting a different member, and your visiting partner might change. You will receive a schedule of who and what week to visit and who is your visiting partner. Your responsibility is to get with your visiting partner and contacting the member to set up a visitation time. Then to go and enjoy learning more about one of our members.

After making a visit you will realize that you are the one that have been blessed. This is a ministry where you receive more than you give.
Please contact Char Ehlers if you are interested in this ministry.

When buying ink from Staples for you or your family please consider using Peace's phone number when checking out. Your purchase of ink can apply to Peace's Rewards program. The office uses the rewards dollars for supplies for our church.

Helping Hands Ministry

For the month of January, we are collecting **cereal**. A basket has been placed in the gathering area in front of the Helping Hands Ministry bulletin board to place donations. Thank you for your support!

CHURCH CLEANING SERVICE

Bryce Dickinson is cleaning the church. He is not an employee of the church. The cost to have Bryce clean our church is **$60 every two weeks**.

A Church Cleaning By-Weekly Schedule has been set up beginning last October. Payments of $60 per pay period are due the first Saturday of the period and are is to be written to Bryce Dickinson and placed in his mailbox at Church.

Please indicate on your check the weeks you are paying for.

The sign-up sheet has been posted on the Church Bulletin Board. Beginning With the October cleaning.

Thank you for your help in keeping our Church cleaned.

If you have any questions, please contact the Property Team.

Did you know that we recycle pull tabs here at Peace?

Pull tabs are taken to the Ronald McDonald House in Lansing

They turn these tabs in to cash to help support the House. The House provides care, comfort, and a free place to stay for families to heal together while their child receives medical treatment.

This is a simple way to help support the House, just pull those tabs off the cans and **place them in the container at church** and Dar will see that they get over to Ronald McDonald House.

Thanks for volunteering to be a Gathering Host.

You don't need to provide an entire meal, just prepare the coffee and bring a small treat like cookies! The coffee is provided by the church!!! Any questions ask anyone on the worship team.

- With Jim & Louise no longer cleaning the Church, the Property team is asking the Gathering hosts to do a little more. The following is a list of items we would like them to do:
  - Wipe off any crumbs or spills on the tables and chairs with sanitizer solution.
  - Unplug coffee pot and warmer, empty grounds & clean pots.
  - Fill & run dishwasher.
  - Wash and put away dishes.
  - Clear off counters & wipe with sanitizer solution.
  - Sweep up any crumbs and wipe up any spills on the floor.
  - Straighten chairs.
- If you have any questions about cleaning up, please ask Joe Crigier

Worship Ministry
February 2026

Date	Sunday 2/1	Sunday 2/8	Sunday 2/15	Sunday 2/22
Altar Guild	Kathy Cook	Kathy Cook	Kathy Cook	Kathy Cook
Audio/ Visual	Scott and Connie Lumbert	Scott and Connie Lumbert	Scott and Connie Lumbert	Scott and Connie Lumbert
Choir Director/ Musician	Bryan Guarnuccio	Bryan Guarnuccio	Bryan Guarnuccio	Bryan Guarnuccio
Fellowship	**Jim and Louise Bradley**	Super Bowl Sunday	Scott and Connie Lumbert	**Volunteer Needed**
Flowers	**Michelle Sherrill**	The Gareiss's	Scott and Connie Lumbert	**Volunteer Needed**
Lector	Susie Moore	Susie Moore	Susie Moore	Susie Moore
Pastor	Pastor Terry Torkko	Pastor Dave Augenstein	Service of the Word	Pastor Dave Augenstein
Ushers	**Jim and Louise Bradley**	**Volunteer Needed**	**Volunteer Needed**	**Volunteer Needed**
Worship Assistant	Bruce Hassen	Bruce Hassen	Bruce Hassen	Bruce Hassen

Church Calendar – February 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 9:30 am Worship w/ Holy Communion 10:30 Gathering	2	3 7:00 pm CAT Team Meeting	4 11:30 am Caring Team Meeting 6:00 pm AA Meeting	5 7:00 pm Choir Rehearsal	6	7
8 JERSEY SUNDAY 9:30 am Worship w/ Holy Communion 10:30 am Tail Gating Gathering 10:45 am Sunday School 11:00 am Communications Team Meeting	9	10 10:00 Worship and Music Team Meeting 7:00 pm Council Meeting	11 6:00 pm AA Meeting	12 8:30 am Men's Breakfast 7:00 pm Choir Rehearsal	13	14 10:30 am Women's Bible Study
15 9:30 am Worship 10:30 am Gathering	16	17 7:00 pm GFS Team Meeting	18 ASH WEDNESDAY@ St. John's 11:30 am Ladies Luncheon 1:00 pm Quilters	19 7:00 pm Choir Rehearsal	20	21 8:00-Noon Loads of Love at Quality Dairy
22 NOISY BUCKET OFFERING 9:30 am Worship with Holy Communion 10:30 Gathering	23 Articles Due for the March Tidings	24 6:00 pm Men's Night Out	25 Mid Week Lenten Study 6:00 pm AA Meeting	26 7:00 pm Choir Rehearsal	27	28

Please feel free to submit articles or pictures for the Tidings to the editor, Kristin Shannon gore.kristin88@gmail.com

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Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.

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