



First Things

August, 2023

Grumbling or Gratitude???

Worship is designed to move the meditation of your heart from self-centered complaint to God-glorifying praise.

Every day of your life you will find reasons to complain and every day of your life you will have reasons to be thankful. These two themes, complaint and gratitude, pull at the heart of each of us. They form fundamentally different ways of viewing the world because they are rooted in fundamentally different ways of viewing yourself. What is your default language? Do you find it easier to complain than to give thanks? Is grumbling the ambient noise of your existence? Are you easily irritated and quickly impatient? Do mundane things get under your skin? Would the people who live nearest to you characterize you as a thankful person or a complaining person? Do you look at your world and find yourself blown away at the many reasons you have every day to give thanks? Do you see yourself as one who has been showered with blessings? Are you humbled by the myriad things in your life that you regularly enjoy, but that you could never argue that you deserve? How often do you whisper thanks to God or communicate thanks to those around you?

But the lifestyle of complaint and the lifestyle of gratitude are both rooted in the way you view yourself. Complaint really is an identity issue.

If you have placed yourself in the center of your world, if you have reduced your active field of concern down to the small confines of your wants, your needs, and your feelings, if it really is all about you, then you will live with an entitled, “I deserve _____” attitude. And because you do, you will have constant reason to complain. You will be constantly focused on what you want, you will have an inflated sense of what you need, and you will be all too conscious of how you feel. So you will grumble your way through life. Why? You will grumble because the reality is that you are NOT at the center; life is NOT about you. The universe doesn’t operate to satisfy your desires. It is a dark, discouraging, miserable way to live.

But if you humbly admit that as a sinner you deserve nothing but God’s wrath and that every good thing in your life is an undeserved blessing – earned for you by Christ, you will find reasons to be grateful everywhere you look. Feelings of thankfulness rather than disappointment will fill your heart. This is where worship helps profoundly. The regular gathering of God’s people for worship serves to shift your meditation from complaint to gratitude by reminding you of who you really are – God’s dearly loved child – and confronting you with the beautiful and faithful mercy of God toward you. As the gospel puts you in your place, it also puts praise in your mouth, and that is a very good thing.

Church Administrative Assistant



Kim Cz (Czechowicz) – a passionate person who knows just about everyone in and everything about La Crescent – became our church secretary in January of 2022. She recently announced that she wished to step down from that role at the end of August. Kim has been a great blessing to our congregation, shining with her social skills and event organizing talents. The spruced up congregational picture board will remain as a part of her legacy for years to come. Thanks so much, Kim! And, just so you know, Kim says you'll still see her around.

In September **Diana Holub** will be taking over as the church Administrative Assistant. If you've been around First Lutheran for a period of time you may have seen Diana helping with various church projects and programs. She came to First Lutheran in 2005 as a new graduate from Martin Luther College assigned to serve as the Assistant Director and Toddler teacher of the La Crescent Christian Childcare Center, an earlier and smaller version of today's First Steps Early Learning Center. In 2006 she took over as Director of LCCC and stayed in that position till 2008. 2005 marked the arrival of her husband Aaron Holub as well, and since then they have been blessed with four children: Eli, Gideon, Joshua, and Rebekah. Currently they have three children still in their care as Gideon was made perfect in 2020, as he passed away due to cancer.

Diana has served in various roles over the years: Customer Service Representative and Administrative Assistant at LHI in La Crosse, First Steps Co-Director and current Administrative Assistant, and vivacious volunteer. Now with her children in school – Eli (sophomore at Luther), Joshua (2nd grade at First- La Crosse) and Rebekah (1st grade at First) – Diana feels that the time is right for her to continue her service to the church in this new capacity.



Update from the Board for Lay Ministry

In the last three months, five children were baptized:

- **Lane & Leo Costigan**, sons of **Erica & Sam** from the Early Learning Center
- **Amara Folstad**, daughter of **Tammy & Jason**
- **Thatcher Eggert**, son of **Jen & Grant**
- **Rosalie Krueger**, daughter of **Brianna & Morgan**

In addition, **Shilo Irvine & Caleb McNally** were married.

Teigen Meiners, wife of **Ryan**, was received into membership.

Rebecca Bartels is transferring her membership to St. Marcus in Milwaukee.

Finances through June

Church Expenses	\$126,886
Church Offerings/Income	\$116,346
Deficit	-\$10,540
ELC Expenses	\$222,539
ELC Income	\$234,553
Mortgage Balance	\$290,962

First Steps Early Learning Center

The ELC continues at or near capacity, which is 8 infants, 14 toddlers, and 16+ preschoolers. There is a great shortage of childcare facilities in our area and our director, Carol Schroeder (she's been with us for three years), receives inquiries on a weekly if not daily basis.

We follow the Minnesota state guidelines for childcare facilities which determines how many children we may admit and how many caregivers there must be – and what training they must have to be a “lead teacher,” an “assistant,” or an “aide.”

One of the biggest challenges continues to be finding caregivers. When the starting salary at Culver's is now \$18.50, there are not a large number of people who are willing to do a more demanding job for less. But we have been blessed with staff members who are very dedicated at what they do. State grants have allowed us to pay bonuses to employees which makes us more competitive.

Please continue to pray for our ELC ministry. Through it we are serving the community. More importantly, we are able to share the good news of Jesus Christ with not only the children but their parents as well.

Training for Ministry

We have heard the sad news – there are a lot of empty pulpits and empty classrooms in our church body, the WELS (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod).

So maybe you're wondering how people train for ministry, to become a pastor or teacher?

While the WELS does operate two boarding high schools (or “prep schools”) and groups of congregations operate 27 area Lutheran high schools (like Luther High School in Onalaska and the new Cornerstone Lutheran High School in Chippewa Falls, WI) many young people who train for ministry come out of public high schools.

The WELS operates Martin Luther College – its “college of ministry” – in New Ulm, MN. Currently there are 627 residential students at MLC.

Those who are preparing to be pastors – about 130 – study religion, Greek, Hebrew, and the liberal arts for four years before going on the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, WI. If men with a bachelor's degree in some other area wish to become pastors, they can complete a *seminary certification program* – studying Greek,

Church Picnic – 9/9

Old Hickory Park – Saturday, September 9
11:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Pulled pork and buns – as well as plates, tableware, condiments and water – will be provided.

SIGN UP in the church entryway to bring a **salad, hot dish, or desert.**



Christmas Concert in the Chapel of the Christ at MLC

Hebrew, and religion – in two years.

Those who are studying to be teachers – about 500 – have a few options:

- All who want to be teachers train to be elementary school teachers in a four-year program
- Some take an additional year to become:
 1. High school teachers
 2. Early childhood ministry teachers
 3. Special needs teachers and
 4. Church musicians

A smaller number of students are studying to be “staff ministers.” And another 120 graduate students are enrolled in programs – many of them online – that will lead to advanced education degrees.

(Someone recently called my attention to the fact that a small picture of me from *the dark ages* appears in MLC’s recent *In Focus* magazine. Actually, I did not attend MLC. Until 1995, those who wanted to be pastors and those who wanted to be teachers studied at two different colleges. Those colleges merged in 1995 and I guess I’m considered an honorary alum of MLC.)

Upcoming Women’s and Men’s Retreats



St. John’s Lutheran Church of Lewiston will be hosting the **Flourish 2023 Retreat for women** on Saturday, August 26. Find out more information, including sessions and presenter bios, [HERE](#).

The Men of His Word Conference – MAN UP in a Down World – will take place in Rochester at the Mayo Civic Center on Saturday, October 28. You can find more info [HERE](#).



Coming Up in August

First Women are meeting on Saturday, August 12

Camp Philip Door Offering – Sunday, August 20

Flourish Women’s Retreat – Saturday, August 26

God Bless,
Pastor Mark