



ANNUAL REPORT

2020



Clementson Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.



A message from
**ELCA Presiding
Bishop
Elizabeth Eaton**

Dear friends in Christ,
Looking across the church, I am grateful for your generous giving of time, talents, and resources. Yes, This year has been a challenging one! The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the church and society. We have had to shift the ways we engage in ministry from a focus on in-person worship and meetings to livestream worship, virtual meetings, and gatherings in the parking lot. We have had to shift to teaching children at home and working from home. We have not been able to travel to see friends or relatives or to celebrate life events. This has also been a time to address economic and social justice issues, to shift our thinking and our way of life.

In times such as this, our baptism in Christ makes a difference and makes us different. Like Christians before us, we recall that God is faithful to God's promises and God's people. We see that God enables us to connect with one another even when we are separated. Shifts in the world invite us to be innovative in how we do God's work and reach out to all ages in making disciples. We see that God is at work not only in our buildings but beyond them as well. We have found new ways to serve our neighbors and reach those in need.

As we experience this time of uncertainty, we sense something new emerging. In many places there are new strategies and renewed energy for ministry, often generated by emerging leaders. We have developed a framework to build on, and now is the time to engage in hard work together. As you do in your congregation, we want our collaborative efforts to be both faithfully thoughtful and sustainable. We want to build up the body of Christ today and for the future. God does continue to bless us! God will provide both relief from life's struggles and hope for a stronger church, God's church. We do not need to know how the future will unfold. As members in the body of Christ, we need only trust that God is with us and will provide.

Building up the body of Christ together,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

“The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.” —Ephesians 4:11-16

Clementson Church Annual Meeting

January 31st, 2021

I. Call to order

II. Devotions

III. Approval of Agenda

IV. Minutes - January 19, 2020

V. Reports

A. Pastor's Report

B. Statistical

C. Financial

D. Treasures

E. Church Women

F. Sunday School

G. Other

VI. Unfinished Business

A. Building improvement

1. Lake of the Woods Bible Camp

2. Foundation windows

3. TV

B. Grounds

1. Tree cleanup

2. Playground equipment

C. Other

VII. New Business

A. Approval of Mission Plan

B. Church Women - refrigerator

C. Election of officers (2-year terms/total of 10)

President - Gary Swenson 2017*

Vice President - Marla Hasbargen 2020

Secretary - Roseann Swenson 2020 (vice president 2012) Treasurer - Sue Hasbargen 2019*

Financial Secretary - Jill Hasbargen 2012

Property - Kit Hasbargen 2020

D. Election of voting members and alternates

1. Northwestern MN Synod Assembly

2. Conference gathering

E. Other

VIII. Adjournment and Lord's Prayer

Minutes from the Clementson Lutheran Church Annual Meeting January 19, 2020

I. The meeting is called to order by President Gary Swenson. Members present Gary Swenson, Rosean Swenson, Jill Hasbargen, Char Hasbargen, Kit Hasbargen, Sue Hasbargen, Rodney Hasbargen, Marla Hasbargen, Jake Hasbargen, Jill Hasbargen, Jacob Hasbargen, Abbi Hasbargen, Gary Hasbargen, Janet Hasbargen, Peggy Hasbargen, Ethel Lucek and Pastor Birgette.

II. **Devotions:** Gary Swenson

III. **Approval of Agenda:** adding to new business - L/W Bible Camp MSC - Kit Hasbargen and Rodney

IV. **Minutes:** MSC - Kit Hasbargen and Jill Hasbargen

V. **Reports:**

1. Pastor report - Pastor Birgette highlighted a commitment to working together, curious about your faith, how/who can we serve, Romans 12:2 “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern with is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect”, Thanks be to God!
2. Statistical
3. Financial
4. Treasures Report
5. Church Women
6. Sunday School
7. MSC - Rodney Hasbargen and Kit Hasbargen all reports

VI. **Unfinished Business:**

1. Building improvements:
 - a. Lighting for the fellowship hall and kitchen - Gary presented a sample light and asked for approval - MSC - Jill Hasbargen and Rodney Hasbargen
 - b. Foundation windows - Gary presented a window with auto close and open but will continue looking for an alternative larger window.
 - c. Bathroom vanity - Roseann volunteered to take on this project
 - d. Kitchen and entry ceiling stains - Jill volunteered to paint and watch for future stains to see if any additional work is needed.
2. Grounds
 - a. Tree cleanup
 - b. Playground equipment
3. Constitution ratification: MSC - Rod Hasbargen and Kit Hasbargen

VII. New Business

1. Approval of Mission Plan - increase Benevolence to \$5000 and building supplies to \$3000. MSC Char Hasbargen and Jake Hasbargen
2. Church Women - refrigerator - Gary will call Janet
3. Election of officers
 - a. President - Gary Swenson (2017)
 - b. Vice President - Roseann Swenson (2012)
 - c. Secretary - Stacy Spina (2019)
 - d. Treasurer - Sue Hasbargen (2019)
 - e. Financial Secretary - Jill Hsbargen (2012)
 - f. Property - nomination made for Kit Hasbargen
 - g. Roseann Swenson volunteered to take the secretary position and search for a vice president.
 - h. MSC - Kit Hasbargen and Char Hasbargen
4. Election of voting members and alternates
 - a. Northwestern MN synod assembly and conference gathering - Gary will call around for volunteers
5. Lake of the Woods Bible Camp - bible camp is made up of 68 acres and 2500 ft of riverfront, plus buildings. In the next 6 months, it will go up on the action. The pastor suggested looking into how to purchase and ways to use it in our mission.
6. Other - spring cleaning set up for May 2nd or May 9th if needed.

VIII. **Adjournment:** MSC - Rodney Hasbargen and Kit Hasbargen.

Closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Respectfully submitted,
Roseann Swenson

Pastor's Report

Psalm 126

¹When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

²Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy;

then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them."

³The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

⁴Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb.

⁵May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

⁶Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Friends in Christ,

What a year it has been. I am so tired of saying "unprecedented" and yet it is the only word to describe this year. For us it has been unprecedented in more ways than just CoVid.

The year 2020 began with hopes for a continued successful trimester with Soul Food, a new staffing organization, and even a strategic plan in our conference. We were prepared for a year of change and growth, one that would focus on possibility and potential.

In February Jeannie Haukaas retired after nearly three decades of work with the Parish. We kicked off Lent expecting to dig into our commitment as disciples and asking the question, "why Jesus?"; then CoVid restrictions began. Suddenly the whole system of the world and our parish was completely off. There was no more sense of normalcy and only constant questions of "how do we do this" and "what will happen next?" Alyse Berggren stepped into a full-time role in order to get the office reorganized and archived; she served full time until August when she stepped back to part time work as a contracted employee. After many conversations and planning sessions with the Parish presidents and the personnel committee, two contracted job descriptions were written up- one for an office manager and one for a confirmation director. The confirmation director role was filled by Sam Lyon and plans were put in place to begin a new format for confirmation (see Sam's report for more details). Then Alyse died and the systems in the office that she was sustaining dropped off as well.

Thankfully, the office is now in the capable and caring hands of Calista Wolf. The parish spent the last quarter of the year trying to worship both online and in person, heading back to the parking lot for advent, and finding ways to bring some joy in the midst of struggle.

We all kept saying, "2020 is the worst, I can't wait until it's over." Now it's over and there is a light at the end of the tunnel, but we have a ways to go still. Psalm 126 is a guiding voice of reality and hope for me these days and I hope that it can be for you as well. The psalmist writes a song called "A Harvest of Joy"; it is a song that bears the weight of sorrow and the promise that sorrow will not win. Verse 5 says, "may those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy." This year we have planted many seeds- resilience, flexibility, creativity, connection- but they were all sown with tears. These seeds were only planted because of global pandemic and death of loved ones, and yet they are seeds that we will be able to harvest with joy. We can see the light at the end of the tunnel, we know that 2021 will be different from 2020, and we will build and rebuild in this new year. Just as verse 1 says, when the Lord restores the fortunes we will be like those who dream. This year we will pick up our dreams from last year, dust them off, decide if they still fit this new world and our new harvest. We will reinvest in our congregations, asking for God's direction and the Spirit's guidance so we too may sing "the Lord has done great things for us" and come home with shouts of joy, carrying the fruit of our labors.



“Simeon took [the baby Jesus] in his arms and praised God, saying, ‘Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.’”

- Luke 2:28-32

Dear Beloved in Christ of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod,

I am writing in the final days of 2020, a year we will be happy to put behind us! In Luke 2, old Simeon meets the baby Jesus and praises God, because in this child the long era of Israel's oppression was behind them and a new era of salvation was dawning. Yet the baby Jesus was, like all babies, all promise and no product. Simeon may have died a satisfied man, but had he lived 33 more years, he would have seen Jesus fulfill some promises... and leave others yet to be fulfilled. Now we live in “the time between.” This is the time between the revelation of Emmanuel, God with us in all of life, and the time when Jesus “will come again to judge the living and the dead,” bringing justice and healing to all. In this time, we walk with the faith of Simeon, thanking God for the salvation we have seen and trusting God for the salvation yet to come. Our Gospel work is also shaped by the “in-between-ness” of these times. We are reassured by the countless ways that God has been faithful to us and to our church in the past, even while we trust that God will continue to show up for us in the daunting challenges we face in the future.

Please take a look at the enclosed/attached document which describes just some of the work we've been about as your synod staff this last year. This list is by no means comprehensive (that would be long, and possibly boring!). It's just the result of some brainstorming at one staff meeting last fall.

Since the start of the pandemic, I've understood our work to be keeping people connected, encouraged, informed and resourced. This has involved weekly and now semi-monthly virtual gatherings with rostered leaders, weekly and now monthly virtual meetings with congregation presidents, along with what has now become a vast collection of resources for church leadership in time of pandemic, COVID safety resources, virtual ministry resources, online worship services, etc.

This last year we've also been hard at work on our new strategic plan for the NW MN Synod. The plan flows from our vision: a people set free by the Gospel to be wholly devoted to Jesus and our neighbor in love. It is guided by our mission to foster safe and healthy places for the ministry of the Gospel to unfold and to shape an abundant future for all. It will focus on four lines of effort: vital small-membership congregations, leadership development, striving for justice and peace and responding to emerging change. Watch for more information on the strategic plan early this year.

Dear ones, thank you for your faithfulness in the Gospel! When the pandemic hit, you quickly adapted and found ways to share the good news in changed and challenging circumstances. Thanks also for your generosity that makes ministry happen, not only there in your congregation, but through your Mission Support, all across NWMN and around the world! Good work. Be encouraged: we are in this together.

In Christ our Brother,

Pastor Bill Tesch, Bishop of the NWMN Synod of the ELCA



Northwestern Minnesota Synod - 222 Congregations Better Together in Making a Difference as WE...

- ❖ Provided over 200 hours of “boots on the ground” support for leaders and communities from our Synod Ministers for Community and Leader Engagement.
- ❖ Responded to the COVID-19 crisis with resources, coaching and giving 76 congregations and individual pastoral leaders resiliency grants totaling \$35,420 (as of 12/15/2020).
- ❖ Host weekly Zoom meetings for council presidents, pastoral leaders, and those working with First Third of Life ministry, offering support and resources.
- ❖ Accompanied 66 rostered leaders and SAMs to their call to serve in congregations, parishes, care centers, and outreach ministry across our Synod.
- ❖ Provide First Call Theological Education for 17 pastors in our Synod and are accompanying nine candidates for rostered leadership.
- ❖ Support the Native Neighbors Table and Synod’s Commission on Racial Equity and Justice work (e.g. “Transform: Faith, Race & Justice” and Blanket Exercise events)
- ❖ Facilitated area strategies in the Roseau, Detroit Lakes and Fergus Falls Conferences.
- ❖ Train and coach 58 leaders from 19 congregations involved in our Synod’s *Practicing Resurrection: Experiencing Vitality* process.
- ❖ Prepared a virtual Middle School Gathering resource for congregations to use with youth groups, confirmation, or as a retreat in this unique time that we all are living in.
- ❖ Are starting new worshipping communities in Moorhead with people experiencing homelessness, and in Bemidji with young adults.
- ❖ Equip and encourage lay leadership through LIFE - Living in Faith Everyday (formerly known as the School for Lay Ministry).
- ❖ Provided on-site guidance and support to 11 congregations in a conflict situation.

A Message from Your Council President:

Dear Members of Clementson Lutheran Church,
 2020 was challenging to say the least but we made lemon aide from the lemons. It would not have been possible without Pastor Birgitte meeting the challenge head-on. Welcome to Calista Wolf and Sam Lyon as new staff. To those who have taken a leadership role in our congregation, a big thank you for being willing to serve. To the congregation, I ask that each of you continue to give of your time, talents, and financial support. Ask God to use you, each of us have gifts that we can share to accomplish our mission.

In Christ,
 Gary Swenson

2020 Statistical Report

Baptisms		
		<i>Total +0 baptized</i>
Confirmation/Affirmation of Faith		
		<i>Total 0 baptized 0 confirmed</i>
Deaths/Funerals/Memorial Services/Burials		
Dorothy Hasbargen	Anna Hasbargen	
Eleanor Wilson		
	<i>Total -3 baptized -3 confirmed</i>	
Membership		
<i>Transferred to other churches/removed by own request/removed by council action</i>		
Albert and Rita Hasbargen	Stacy and Sharon Spina	
	<i>Total - baptized -4 confirmed</i>	
<i>Members Received</i>		
Anna Hasbargen		
	<i>Total +1 baptized +1 confirmed</i>	
	Baptized	Confirmed
December 31, 2019	132	96
December 31, 2020	130	90

CHURCH OUTREACH

3680 4/15 Northwestern MN Synod \$3,000.00

Clementson Benevolence

3675 3/15 Pastor Birgette-gift \$ 500.00

3688 7/6 Derek & Tracy Cook-gift \$1,000.00

3692 11/1 Pastor Birgette-pastor appreciation \$500.00

3695 12/22 Pastor Birgette-Christmas gift \$ 250.00

Total \$2,250.00

CHURCH HOME 1517 Media

3673 3/1 Media 1517 \$17.40

3684 5/25 Media 1517 17.40

Total \$34.80

WINE

3667 1/27 Westside Wine 17.49

Total 17.49

SNOW PLOWING

3668 1/27 Greg Johnson \$120.00

3671 2/14 Greg Johnson 90.00

3676 3/13 Rod Hasbargen-shoveling roof 90.00

Total \$300.00

ELECTRICITY

EFT	1/22	North Star Electric	\$153.00
EFT	2/21		151.00
EFT	3/21		157.00
EFT	4/23		128.00
EFT	5/21		108.00
EFT	6/21		85.00
EFT	7/23		67.00
EFT	8/21		62.00
EFT	9/23	Capital credits applied \$122.15	.00
EFT	10/22		22.00
EFT	11/21		94.00
EFT	12/20		99.00
		Total	\$1,126.00

CHURCH INSURANCE

EFT	1/10	North Star Insurance	\$94.33
EFT	2/11		94.33
EFT	3/11		94.37
EFT	4/10		96.58
EFT	5/10		96.58
EFT	6/10		96.58
EFT	7/10		96.58
EFT	8/12		96.58
EFT	9/10		96.58
EFT	10/10		96.58

EFT	11/12		96.58
EFT	12/10		96.58
			\$1,152.25

TELEPHONE

EFT	1/23	CenturyLink	\$60.11
EFT	2/25		59.55
EFT	3/26		59.55
EFT	4/24		59.55
EFT	5/28		59.30
EFT	6/25		59.30
EFT	7/24		59.30
EFT	8/26		60.31
EFT	9/24		60.35
EFT	10/23		60.35
EFT	11/26		60.46
EFT	12/23		60.46

Total **\$718.59**

MISSION SUPPORT

3666	1/22	Baudette Lutheran Parish	\$1,720.05
3669	2/14	difference for January	169.55
3670	2/14	Baudette Lutheran Parish	1,889.60
3674	3/10	Baudette Lutheran Parish	1,889.60
3678	4/1	Baudette Lutheran Parish	1,889.60

3682	5/4	Baudette Lutheran Parish	1,889.60
3685	6/8	Baudette Lutheran Parish	1,889.60
3686	7/6	Baudette Lutheran Parish	1,889.60
3689	8/10	Baudette Lutheran Parish	1,889.60
3690	9/2	Baudette Lutheran Parish	1,889.60
3691	10/15	Baudette Lutheran Parish	1,889.60
3693	11/9	Baudette Lutheran Parish	1,889.60
3694	12/1	Baudette Lutheran Parish	1,889.60
		Total	\$22,675.20

LAWN MOWING

Donated time by the Cook family

MUSIC

3681	4/25	Jody Horntvedt	\$115.00
		Total	\$115.00

SAFE DEPOSIT BOX

EFT	1/3	Wells Fargo	30.00
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FUEL

3687	7/14	Cenex-propane prebuy 1500 gallons @\$1.39 per gallon	\$125.83 prepay left
			Total \$1,959.17

BUILDING & BUILDING SUPPLIES

3672	2/16	Gary Swenson-payback on lights	214.06
3683	5/25	Gary Swenson-payback on lights	317.18

Total \$531.24

MISC EXPENSE

3663	1/10	Cenex-buns for Christmas program	35.00
3677	3/13	Marla Hasbargen-material for quilts	44.49
3679	4/3	Hometown Hardware-material for quilts	99.09
		Total	\$178.58

Total 2020 disbursements \$34,088.32

Checking Account funds 1-1-20 \$64,233.99

Checking Account funds 12-31-20 \$57,259.15

Memorial Fund 1-1-20 \$6,013.18

Memorial Fund 12-31-20 \$6,869.06

CLEMENTSON LUTHERAN CHURCH EXPENSES 2019 and MISSION PLAN for 2020

CHURCH OUTREACH	Actual 1019	Proposed 2020	Actual 2020	Proposed 2021
Synod Benevolence	\$3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00
Synod Assembly	475.01	550.00	.00	550.00

World Hunger	171.00	150.00	.00	150.00
LOW Food Shelf	171.00	150.00	.00	150.00
Clem. Benevolence	1,300.00	2,000.00	2,250.00	2,500.00
TOTALS	\$5,117.01	5,850.00	5,250.00	6,350.00

CHURCH HOME

1517 Media	466.96	550.00	34.80	550.00
Stamps	0	0	0	0
Flowers	205.00	200.00	.00	200.00
Wine	32.14	75.00	17.49	75.00
Piano Tuning	0	100.00	0	125.00
Misc Expenses	378.96	1,000.00	178.58	1,000.00
Electricity	1,215.00	1,200.00	1,126.00	1,300.00
Insurance	1,132.00	1,200.00	1,152.25	1,200.00
Telephone	714.87	720.00	718.59	750.00
Fuel	2,019.78	2,300.00	1,959.17	2,300.00
Building Supplies	4,229.30	1,000.00	531.24	1,000.00
Snow Plowing	210.00	300.00	300.00	300.00
Lawn Mowing	350.00	300.00	.00	350.00
Safe Deposit Box	30.00	30.00	30.00	30.00
Musicians	315.00	200.00	115.00	250.00
Totals	\$11,299.01	\$9,175.00	\$6,163.12	\$9,430.00

BAUDETTE LUTHERAN PARISH Actual 2019 Proposed 2020 Actual 2020 Proposed 2021

Mission Plan Support	\$16,068.00	\$20,000.00	\$22,675.20	\$23,000.00
Totals	\$32,484.02	\$35,025.00	\$34,088.32	\$38,780.00

Clementson Lutheran
2020 Financial Secretary Report

Month-end offering totals

January	2694.00
February	2895.00
March	1492.25
April	2805.00
May	2570.00
June	2120.00
July	2505.00
August	1285.00
September	1890.00
October	4876.00
November	2555.00
December	<u>4640.00</u>
2020 Total	<u>\$32327.35</u>
2019 Total	\$41259.75

Miscellaneous Income:

Co-op Service Patronage Dividend	13.32
Cenex Co-op Special gift	<u>200.00</u>
	<u>\$213.32</u>

Jill Hasbargen - Financial Secretary

Checking Account

Balance 1-1-2020		\$12913.38
Disbursements:		
Lake of the Woods Foods	\$234.76	
Dorothy Hasbargen memorial	25.00	
Joe's Northwest Pest Control	140.00	
New Moon: Eleanor's lunch	165.00	
Hardware Hank	28.49	
Women of Today: Santa Anonymous	<u>300.00</u>	
Total	\$893.25	\$ 893.25
Ending Balance 12-31-2020		\$12020.13

Saving Account

Balance 1-1-2020	\$12974.47
Interest withheld \$1.87	
Interest earned \$.38	
Balance 1-31-2020	\$12975.96

Clementson Lutheran Sunday School

Beginning balance 1/1/20 ----- \$594.42

Ending balance 12/31/20 ----- \$594.42

Stewardship Report 2020

The Northwest Minnesota Synod put together a team of pastors, lay leaders, and synod staff to organize and create resources for stewardship. These resources were geared specifically towards smaller congregations that didn't have a history of stewardship practices. The theme for 2020 was, "Lord, stir us to dream." As a member of the planning team, Pastor Birgitte decided to implement the program within the Parish. This was the first stewardship campaign in the parish in a very long time. Each week had a different theme- Lament, Repent, Dream, Celebrate- intended to help the congregation members engage with the faith practice and intention behind stewardship. A letter was sent out to our active member lists throughout the parish outlining the plan for the campaign. The third Sunday was set as the response Sunday in which members were asked to write down their financial commitment to their home congregation on an ornament, the commitments were kept confidential, and then hung on the Christmas tree at the front of our parking lot sanctuary. While there were not many responses this year, the campaign should be considered a success. We spent time together reflecting on stewardship and commitments to God and dreaming together of a future for the church. This was our first stewardship campaign, but it will definitely not be our last. We look forward to another campaign next year, one that will continue to lead us to ask, "Lord, stir us to dream."

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

OPENING LITURGY

Litany

L. O God of all power and love ...

C. ... we give thanks for your unfailing presence.

L. O God of all power and love, we give thanks ...

C. ... for the hope you provide in times of uncertainty and loss.

L. O God of all power and love ...

C. ... we ask you to send your Holy Spirit to enkindle in us your holy fire.

L. O God of all power and love, we ask you...

C. ... to revive us to live as Christ's body in the world.

L. O God of all power and love, we ask to be ...

C. ... a people who pray, worship, learn, break bread, share life, heal neighbors, bear good news, seek justice, rest, and grow in the Spirit.

L. O God of all power and love, we ask you to be with

C... wherever and however we gather. Unite us in common prayer and send us in common mission, that we and the whole creation might be restored and renewed, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Text: Mark Glaeser, b. 1956, and Donna Hanna, b. 1952
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Build Us Up, Lord

1 Build us up, Lord, build us up; set in
2 Build us up, Lord, build us up; let our

us a strong foun - da - tion. Lead us to do your
lives re - flect your glo - ry. Cast a - way all our

ho - ly will; form and shape your new cre - a - tion.
doubts and fears; help us tell the world your sto - ry.

Build us up, Lord, build us up; as we
Build us up, Lord, build us up; help us

guide and teach each oth - er, help us to share your love with the
bear good fruit for you, Lord, give us vi - sion and keep us

world: ev - 'ry sis - ter, ev - 'ry broth - er.
sure. Grant us faith that's stead - fast and true.

Refrain
Grow - ing in Christ, we plant seeds for the king - dom; we fol - low in
faith what's be - gun! Lord, set in our hearts the pow'r of your
word to spread the news of your Son!

Text: Mark Glaeser, b. 1956, and Donna Hanna, b. 1952
Music: BUILD US UP, Mark Glaeser and Donna Hanna
Text and music © 2003 Augsburg Fortress.

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In the early verses of Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Ephesus, a city on the Aegean Sea at the mouth of a river and at the intersection of three trading routes. The letter was written about ten years after the church had started. During the early years of this congregation, Jews and Gentiles from several ethnicities and nationalities had come together to form “one body.” Paul was aware that they had done well and commended them for their faith and love.

The word “one” appears more than seven times in the first four verses. This reflects the importance Paul gave to being called into the “unity of Christ.” He wanted to note that, although many of the church members came from far off, there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” This oneness reflects God’s gift of reconciliation in Christ.

A second emphasis from Paul was that, as believers, they were to “bear with one another in love.” This would require humility, gentleness, and patience as each of them practiced their faith. It would require tolerance to “maintain unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

A third emphasis was that each person had been given gifts by God and that these gifts were given to increase the whole. Because the Ephesian church was a young congregation and its members were just beginning in their faith journey, their understandings were often tossed to and fro. But as they grew in faith, each person contributed to building up the body of Christ.

The fourth and final emphasis was that by “speaking the truth in love,” each person must grow into Christ. This means taking time to learn about one another and their gifts. Knowing these gifts, we can do God’s work both within and beyond the faith community. When there are decisions to make or relationships to reconcile, we know to begin with prayer and reflection, always desiring to speak the truth in love — not for our own benefit but for God’s glory, that we might become more complete.

As our members and friends gather today, whether face-to-face or online, we are reminded of our calling into “unity in Christ.” We come from many places and work in many contexts, and yet we recognize “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

Whether new to a worshiping community or further along the journey, we realize that humility, gentleness, and patience are required both in the good times and especially in times of uncertainty and struggle. God wants us to be more complete through our work. Christ provides the way. The Holy Spirit is with us for guidance and courage. Each of us has been given the gifts to be complete, and through our faithfulness we will grow stronger and work together as one body.

Let us pray: Lord, let the words of the apostle Paul dwell in us deeply. May we embrace the reconciling power of oneness with Christ. May this oneness guide our congregation as we live into the new realities of these times. As we meet new partners in ministry, may we take time to get to know them with patience, humility, and love. Help us to see how sharing our gifts will make your work easier and more fulfilling while bringing all of us closer to Christ. May the blessings you give each day strengthen us to a living, daring confidence in your grace. Amen.