



# The Branches

Volume 2 ■ Number 1  
July 2005 ■ Summer

## *Liberty and Service*

**"The Attitude of A Servant and Ways to Serve."** What an odd theme for July, the month we celebrate freedom the most in the US. Our attitudes are geared toward celebrating victory over oppressors, being free in an enslaved world, and making decisions for ourselves. We associate servanthood and service to others with being in bondage as a type of slave—something negative. Being free, the seeming opposite of being a servant, is the more desirable thing to be. Why would anyone want to be a servant? And why would I want to have the attitude of one and come up with ways to be one?

But if we celebrate freedom, we celebrate service. They are intertwined with each other in both our physical life and our spiritual life. In matters of our country, we depend on the willingness of others to "serve" for us, to surrender their time, efforts, and life to keeping the rest of us "free." It is because of their unselfish sacrifices that we may live in this wonderful country. We need to thank God for supplying us with people dedicated to freedom enough to become servants. And we should thank those who serve for our benefit.

In matters of our spirits, we depend on the grace of God who has provided One to serve us also. He surrendered His only Son as a sacrifice for our sin so we can live free and eternally. Jesus dedicated Himself to freeing us from bondage to sin. Losing His life, then rising again, He gained our freedom. It is because of His unselfish sacrifice that we are able to live in God's wonderful kingdom. We need to thank God for supplying us with freedom from sin. In our thankfulness, we are willing to be servants for Him. Our cup overflows with the grace shown to us, and we, in turn, serve each other.

The pages that follow are filled with reminders, ideas, and encouragement concerning serving others. We each do what we can in good faith and trust God uses those things to His glory.

—Abby Matzke, *St. Peter's, Stambaugh, MI*

***"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."***

—Galatians 5:13

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# 2005 CLC Women's Retreat

The 6th annual retreat was held in Trego, WI on April 1,2,3, 2005. Spring weather abounded with plenty of sunshine and temperatures in the 60s. The theme was "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 33:12).

Pastor Nolting led the Friday discussion. We shared ideas about our worldview—our view of the world. We discussed the differences between a secular and a Biblical worldview and examined passages that help to form our Biblical worldview.

The Saturday and Sunday speakers contrasted the secular worldview (the lies of the world) with the Biblical worldview (the truth of God) on many current issues in our society. Using Scripture, they gave us responses to use when faced with these lies in our everyday lives. Norma Rust spoke on overpopulation and views of children. Stephanie Altom enlightened us on environmental stewardship. Lori Marzofka guided us through views on marriage and equality of the sexes, also touching on topics such as homosexuality and feminism. Laila Fleischer motivated us to be active Christian citizens and to use our free speech and democracy to make the truths of God heard. Jennifer Schmitt spoke of respecting life from conception to old age.

Saturday afternoon was spent in mini-sessions such as "Running a Business Meeting" (Tina Eichstadt), "Financial Independence" (Alana Ahrens), a slide show presentation of the Holy Land (Pastor Dale Redlin), a Christian book discussion (Bea Gerbitz), pampering (Jackie Radichel), cutting TVBS crafts, and hiking in the woods.

The Saturday evening banquet included baked walleye with cheesecake for dessert. Our banquet speaker was Rhonda White, who related her recent experiences in Kuwait and Baghdad as an Army nurse. She gave a very informative and moving slide presentation on what it was like to be a Christian in a non-Christian world.

The entertainment both nights was fun. Friday night we played "Name that Hymn" with Marit Ahrens and Kristen Nolting. Saturday night was a sing-along of Patriotic songs and hymns led by Grace Schreyer. Lynette Roehl also gave a very informative slide presentation on the history of Ingram Hall and the Ingram Estate before it became the ILC campus.

The Sunday communion worship service was led by Pastor Nolting with an inspiring sermon by Pastor Dale Redlin. The sermon discussed how we are the salt and light of the earth and are expected to share the Gospel with others based on Matthew 5:13-16.

Of course, the cabin I stayed in, Poplar, was the noisiest of all and stayed up the latest (I think). We visited with friends over popcorn and cut, cut, cut craft projects for TVBS supplied by Evlyn Carlile. As in other years, the weekend went too fast, but the memories will last!

—Karen Schaser, Peace thru Christ, Middleton, WI

## News & Notes

The 2005 West Central Conference Women's Retreat is scheduled for September 9, 10, & 11. It will be held at Chadron State Park, Chadron, Nebraska. Six duplexes and four cabins are reserved. West Central Conference churches should have received information in June. If you did not receive any, please contact Laila Fleischer at [lfleischer2@hotmail.com](mailto:lfleischer2@hotmail.com). You don't have to belong to the West Central Conference to attend—all are welcome!

# Love Expressed in Service to Others

**Why Serve Others?** “In this the love of God was manifested toward us...not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:9-11).

You and I are the beneficiaries of the greatest display of love the world has ever witnessed. Through faith, the work of the Holy Spirit, we believe that this Jesus is our Savior, a gift given to us personally. Can we truly hear this message too often? Hardly not! We cherish its repetition. This is our life’s blood...God has loved us in Christ! No one can make a greater impression than God the Father has already made!

If we are truly impressed, we act. God’s love for us, visual in Jesus, creates love for Him. Part of the way in which we express this love is through serving others—our “walk in love.” It cannot be otherwise. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control” (Galatians 5:22).

**Whom Do We Serve?** Our Savior Jesus died for ALL. Our lives of service should likewise know no boundaries. Our neighbor becomes anyone in need. There are no reasons for exclusion—not color, not race, not age, not wealth, not poverty, not standard of living, not looks, not odor, not attention nor inattention paid the laws of our land, not church affiliation nor lack thereof.

Our fellow Christians should receive preferential treatment. They are our family in Christ, the people with whom we will share eternity (Galatians 6:10). From the family of faith, we turn to those with whom we may share familiarity—our neighbors. We are encouraged to serve them for the purpose of “edifying” (Romans 15:2). That word suggests spiritual growth, hopefully their growth becoming a fruit of our service. We are likewise encouraged by Matthew 5:42 to simply respond to all who make requests of us, familiarity being no pre-requisite for our acts of love.

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you” (Luke 6: 27). This admonition is a bit tough for our Old Adam to swallow. How easy is it to serve those who have hurt us deeply, those who perhaps despise or hate us? The passage cited doesn’t seem to provide room for an if, and, or but. Yes, we must serve enemies too.

**How Do We Serve?** “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another” (1 Thessalonians 4:9). We serve through love. It suggests use of tongue and hands to honor God and help our neighbor. We are to mirror God’s will in our acts of love. God has given us a basic guide for behavior: the Ten Commandments. Upon cursory inspection, the Commandments would appear to curb behavior by the familiar “Thou shalt nots...” However, Christ said, “Love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10). Also, in his explanation of the Decalogue, Martin Luther expands by describing not only behaviors which God would have us avoid, but also provides a general outline of acts of love in which He would have us engage: “but honor, serve, and obey them, and hold them in love and esteem,” “but help and befriend him in every bodily need,” “help him to improve and protect his property and business.”

Acts of love need not be newsworthy, flamboyant, expensive, or creative; they need not even be perfect. Even though an act may not be extravagant, if we are its object, we do remember! We recognize love for what it is because we sense that both the attitude accompanying the giving and the act itself are God-pleasing.

**What Hinders Our Service?** “But what I hate, that I do...So then, with the mind I myself serve the Law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Romans 7:15, 25). Our ideal companion is the New Man, however, we acknowledge the often prevailing companion: the Old Adam. We are too familiar with his antics. He is not appreciative of God’s salvation in Christ. He is not interested in engaging in God’s will. He is sullen, self-centered, judgmental. He is a constant in our lives. When overcome by his persuasion, when his argument, “What’s in it for me?” prevails, we will not serve others.

*Continued on next page.*

## *Love Expressed in Service to Others—Continued*

“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Galatians 6:9). We can become weary both emotionally and physically. Caring for families, making financial ends meet, overcoming challenges when illness strikes, handling deadlines, mastering everything which ends up on our individual “plates” is exhausting. There are days or seasons in our lives during which we hardly have the physical energy or emotional strength to care for ourselves, much less extend ourselves to others. If we become spiritually weary, if the precious Gospel message begins to mean less and less to us personally, our service suffers. We may fail to serve because the motivation to do so is just not there any more.

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (I Timothy 6: 10). Service can be costly, in the dollars and cents sense of the word. If we continually think beyond food and raiment, if we struggle with discontent, if our greatest desire lies in acquisition, we may have great difficulty both extending ourselves and sharing our belongings with others.

We may fail to serve readily or easily, simply because we are not so inclined. We just don’t think about it, or if we do, we procrastinate because we are unsure. Perhaps even more than this, we may fear being reproached, rebuffed, or attacked for what we intend as an act of kindness. We are aware that the love motivating an act of service may not appear as such by its beneficiary. We fail to act because we are afraid of rejection.

At times, you and I may be an obstacle for others who attempt to do good. We become the bushel basket thrown over their lampstand. If I am the object of another’s charitable act and I fail to acknowledge that act with humble appreciation, if I choose to be insulted, if I see myself as being more independent than the giver suggests I might be, if I am afraid that I will reveal my vulnerability through acceptance of this kindness, if I must always give rather than receive, then I am casting a huge shadow on my benefactor’s attempt to let his/her light shine. We share a responsibility for encouraging others to grow in their faith, both their faith in Jesus and in their lives of sanctification. That may mean that, on occasion, we graciously receive from them, possibly even acknowledging that they may be better at assessing our current need than are we.

**How Do We Overcome Obstacles To Service?** “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5). If we are to produce, we need draw closer to the Vine, our Lord Jesus. As the beautiful full moon merely reflects the light of the radiant sun, so we cannot shine apart from the Sun of Righteousness. In our lives we can merely reflect the light of God’s grace in Christ; we respond more fully as our relationship with Him grows.

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you” (John 15:16). Pray for increased faith in Jesus. Pray for greater ability to recognize and meet others’ needs. We are promised that the Father, who hears our prayer, will respond. How amazing that we are chosen—that we are enabled—to bear fruit! Surely the Father will also provide the where-with-all for us to do so.

“For you, Lord, are good and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You” (Psalm 86:5). “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7). To whom do we turn when we are overwhelmed with our shortcomings? If we look within we may become even more discouraged. Scripture encourages us to “keep our chin up,” that is, pointed in the right direction. The Lord forgives our sins of omission. He provides the clean slate. His forgiving love is the source of our sanctification.

May the blessing of joy, in Our Father’s goodness, abide within you; May the blessing of peace, in our Savior, rest upon you; May the blessing of love, created by the Spirit, flow out through you; May all the blessings of our Lord be yours.

—Ruth Ahrens, *Grace, Valentine, NE*



# A Servant's Prayer

Dear Lord,

I am a servant in your kingdom, working to proclaim the truth of Your saving Gospel in the world. And yet I know that though the work is mine to do, the ability and gifts to do it come from You. So I ask, Lord, that you would make me:

**Trusting, as Abraham, that I may follow You along my unknown path.**

**Patient, as Job, that though I may suffer, You have promised to uphold me.**

**Faithful, as Joseph, that I may love You above all else.**

**Courageous, as Joshua, that though I live in the world, I am not of the world.**

**Redeemed, as Your servant David, that when I fall into temptation  
Your endless grace would bring me back into Your fold.**

**Humble, as Mary, that I may praise You when You bless my work with success.**

**Bold, as Peter, to speak Your words to all whom I meet.**

**Loving, as Stephen, even if I face hatred and opposition.**

Lord Jesus, You were the Perfect Servant. Help me to be a reflection of You in this sin-darkened world. And finally, Lord, graciously bring me through this evil world into the everlasting joys of heaven. In Your Saving Name I ask this. Amen.

—Vanessa Wales, Holy Trinity, West Columbia, SC



## Serve the Lord with Gladness

My back may ache,  
My shoulders sore,  
My knees give out  
When I clean the floor.

My fingers swell  
In a pail of soap.  
I broadly smile  
Knowing I can cope.

My breathing labors,  
My brow is wet,  
But I still know  
I'm not done yet!

My elbows creak.  
My wrists are weak.  
My voice still cracks  
When I start to speak.

I've dusted, polished,  
Raked and mowed.  
I've sung new songs  
Not sung of old.

I've helped at school,  
Church records kept,  
Designed new places  
Our servants slept.

I've typed and copied  
Much more than most –  
But all of this  
Is not my boast!

It all is done  
In joy and praise,  
To serve my God  
Through all my days.

—Jacquelyn Radichel, Grace, Fridley, MN

## Women of Faith

When my pastor and his wife visited me in my home nine years ago, I wanted to say, “No! Not now, Pastor, I can’t!” But I knew that I could not refuse. I was a mother of three young children under the age of five and I knew that the Lord had more for me to do.

You might be wondering what they asked me to do and some of you might laugh when you hear what it was—they asked me to play the organ/piano in church at least one Sunday a month. I don’t know about you, but I am the type of person whose hands start to shake when I get nervous. I have played piano since the age of eight, but mostly for myself. As soon as someone looks over my shoulder or starts to sing along, I make mistakes from sheer nervousness.

So, I agreed to do it, even though I had never been trained to play the organ. I did have some prior experience at another church when the only organist had to go to another congregation who did not have anyone to play. But, I told myself, it was a smaller congregation and I had no children at the time to keep me busy all day.

Nine years later, I still play at least once a month in our church. I am still not a trained organist, but the other two organists are always ready to help. I still don’t “do pedals,” but I have a book that I plan to use to teach myself to do this. I also realize that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). I pray every time I play that the Holy Spirit would work through my hands to lead the congregation in singing their hymns of praise. I have also told myself that it is ok to not be perfect: “...My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). That doesn’t mean that I don’t practice or prepare, but it helps me to be less nervous. I also try to think about the meaning of the hymn words. I read them beforehand, of course!

I will always be more relaxed and “enjoy” a service more when someone else is playing the organ, but I must admit, it gets easier each time and it is one small way that I can serve my Lord.

—Karen Schaser, *Peace thru Christ, Middleton, WI*

## Book Review

### **Mrs. Robert E. Lee by John Perry**

This book was recommended to me by a friend, and I recommend that you read it too! Mary Curtis Lee had a strong will and faith that carried her through what must have been the worst time of this country’s history. Her husband was often gone from home for long periods, even before he became a general for the Rebel cause. Two of their children died, and a grandchild also, and two of their sons served in the military. On top of that, her beloved home, Arlington, was turned into a cemetery during the war.

Mary Curtis was crippled at an early age with arthritis, but she never lost her spirit of kindness, courtesy, and generosity. Perry’s book is an inspiring picture of a great lady!

—Edith Haertl, *Holy Cross, Phoenix, AZ*

## News & Notes

The 2006 CLC Women’s Retreat will be held April 21, 22, & 23. Three duplexes and 10 hotel rooms are on reserve. Information will go out in late December 2005. This will be the 7<sup>th</sup> year for this gathering, and it will be held at the Schwann Retreat Center in Trego, Wisconsin.





**“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children  
and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us...”**

*Ephesians 5:1-2*

I have always wished that I was a gifted mimic. I can imitate the neighbor down the road with a drawl of an accent fairly well enough to get a laugh anyway. I can imitate a British accent, but I murder the Australian one. On the other hand, I have not spent enough time perfecting my imitation of Christ. How sad that I would try to imitate a British accent, and not a Heavenly one.

Our pastor said in his sermon one day: “Unbelievers may not read the Bible, but they read Believers.” They read our faces, our actions, the meaning of our words. This speaks much louder than I ever realized. Live in such a way that those who know you but don’t know God will come to know God because they know you. In a devotion I received a while back there was a story of a missionary who went to a remote island to teach them about Jesus. He lived among them for 20 years, helping them, working among them, and showing them Christ’s love, but never learned to speak their language very well. Some years later, more missionaries arrived with a translator, and they began speaking of Jesus, His kind actions, and His love. The native people replied that “Yes! They knew of this Jesus, He had been living among them for many years.”

I am certain that had I been the missionary on that island, they may have had many names for me, but Jesus probably would not be one of them! Although we know that we can never be perfect like Christ, we also know we need to strive to be like Him. So when unbelievers see me, do they see a Christ-like attitude? A patient, Christian woman? Are they reading a peaceful, gentle person? Or perhaps they see a snappy, “hurry up and get this done” woman, and a grouchy “things are not going my way!” person. Would an unbeliever wonder where that light within was coming from? Would they wonder how I can be so peaceful in chaotic circumstances? Would my attitude cause them to want to find out my secret for a joyful life? I’m afraid that I have, for the most part, hoped that I would not have to be the one that unbelievers were looking at—they can look to some other Christian, can’t they? But what if all Christians failed as I have? What would the unbelievers have left to “read”?

So why is it so hard to imitate Christ, and so easy to imitate the guy down the road? Unlike copying the guy with the southern drawl, imitating Christ is not easy, but the benefits are great and far-reaching! When I think of the possibility of influencing the life of another person simply by how they “read” me—it is amazing! Again, I am capable of none of this on my own. The Lord’s love, when I allow it to, can shine through me to everyone that I come in contact with. What a wonderful opportunity Our Savior gives me every day—a new chance to be His beacon! So I have the choice—I can continue to work on my Australian accent (wish me luck!), but most importantly I will work on improving my imitation of Our Savior!

—Julie Schopp, St. Luke’s, Lemmon, SD

## Reader’s Request

From a widowed pastor’s wife: Is there any way that the widowed pastors’ wives and the retired pastors’ wives can get reconnected? It seems as if many of them have lost touch with each other. Send ideas to the editor; see back page for address information.

# CLC Postcard

## From Holy Trinity, West Columbia, SC

Hey, Y'all, from South Carolina's only CLC church, Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran, located in the heart of the state! We are in West Columbia, just adjacent to the state capital of Columbia.

In May of this year we mark the beginning of "middle age" for us as we celebrate our 40th anniversary. At that celebration the charter members will be relating brief recollections of our beginnings. These members originally came out of several LCA churches when they became convinced that the LCA was no longer teaching the whole and pure Word of God. In 1965 they fled from the destructive teachings of the LCA to form Holy Trinity congregation and to hold fast to the truth of Holy Scripture.

Fittingly, they named the road on which the church was built Pella Avenue. In Matthew 24:15 ff, Jesus speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) because of the unbelief of the Jews, warning the people to flee to the mountains for safety when the Roman armies entered Judea. Forty years later, those who believed Jesus' word fled to the mountains of Pella.

Even though they remained independent for many years, the congregation called CLC pastors to serve them. Their first CLC pastor was Paul F. Nolting. He joined them in 1967 and guided them through 12 sometimes difficult, but joy-filled years of spiritual growth. We sent our first delegates to CLC Convention in 1970. We are presently served by Pastor Vance Fossum.

There are 219 members who also support a Christian Day School. Currently we are served by two teachers, Marion Fitschen (pre-school-3rd grade) and Principal Nathan Wales (4th- 8th grades), and we have 18 students. In addition, our church operates a licensed Day Care for our church family or anyone who is interested in joining our congregation. Through the years we have been blessed with devoted women who have assisted working parents in caring for the daily spiritual and physical needs of many children of the congregation.

All of this is done by God's grace in a complex built by members on five acres of land. It is nestled among a beautiful grove of loblolly pines sprinkled with azaleas and dogwoods. An especially lovely time to visit is spring; but whenever you visit (or chose to settle here)—and we hope you do!—you will find a warm reception from a closely-knit family of fellow Christ-believers.

—Christine Fossum, Holy Trinity, West Columbia, SC

## Hymn 439, 3 & 5

Teach us the lesson Thou hast taught,  
To feel for those Thy blood hath bought,  
That every word and deed and thought  
May work a work for Thee.

In sickness, sorrow, want, or care,  
Whatever it be, 'tis ours to share;  
May we, where help is needed, there  
Give help as unto Thee!

**"Therefore, my beloved brethren,  
be steadfast, immovable,  
always abounding in the work  
of the Lord, knowing that your  
labor is not in vain in the Lord."**

—1 Corinthians 15:58



## Letter from a Friend

I just had to write to tell you how much I love you and care for you. Yesterday, I saw you walking and laughing with your friends. I hoped that soon you'd want Me to walk along with you, too. So, I painted you a sunset to close your day and whispered a cool breeze to refresh you. I waited—you never called—I just kept on loving you.

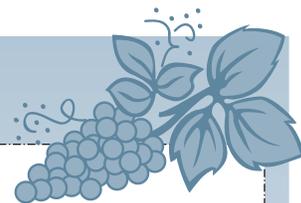
As I watched you fall asleep last night, I wanted so much to touch you. I spilled moonlight onto your face—trickling down your cheeks as so many tears have. You didn't even think of Me; I wanted so much to comfort you.

The next day I exploded a brilliant sunrise into a glorious morning for you. But you woke up late and rushed off to work—you didn't even notice. My sky became cloudy and My tears were the rain.

Oh, if you'd only listen. I really love you. I try to say it in the quiet of the green meadow and in the blue sky. The wind whispers My love throughout the treetops and spills it into the vibrant colors of all the flowers. I shout it to you in the thunder of the great waterfalls and compose songs for birds to sing for you. I warm you with the clothing of my sunshine and perfume the air with nature's sweet scent. My love for you is deeper than any ocean and greater than any need in your heart. If you'd only realize how I care. My Dad sends His love. I want you to meet Him—He cares, too. Fathers are just that way. So, please call on Me soon. No matter how long it takes, I'll wait—because I love you. Your friend, Jesus.

—Hope Luurtsema, *Rock of Ages, Grand Rapids, MI; author unknown*

## Delicious Dishes



### My Grandma's Vegetable Beef Soup

cubed stew meat	2 carrots, sliced
1 onion, diced	Lawry's seasoned salt
2-3 beef bullion cubes	1 large can diced tomatoes
4 or 5 cubed potatoes	1 large can tomato sauce
1 1/2 c. chopped cabbage	3 bay leaves
2 stalks celery, chopped	butter
3/4 c. quick-cooking barley	1 tsp. basil

In a stock pot, brown beef and onion in butter. After beef is browned, cover with water and simmer for 1 hour. Add remaining ingredients and more water if needed. Simmer another 2 to 3 hours. Remove bay leaves before serving. This soup makes a large batch, and freezes very well. It is better the longer it simmers, and is great the next day.

—Julie Schopp, *St. Luke's, Lemmon, SD*

### Eclair Torte

1 c. water	1/2 c. butter
1/4 tsp. salt	1 c. all-purpose flour
4 eggs	3 c. cold milk
1 package cream cheese, softened	
2 packages (3.4 oz. each) vanilla instant pudding	
1 carton (12 oz.) frozen whipped topping, thawed	
chocolate syrup	

Over medium heat, bring water, butter, and salt to a boil. Add flour; stir until a smooth ball forms. Remove from heat; let stand 5 min. Add eggs one at a time; beat each until smooth. Spread into a greased 9x13. Bake at 400° degrees for 30-35 min., until puffed and golden brown. Cool completely on a wire rack. In a mixing bowl, beat pudding mix and milk on low, add cream cheese; beat until smooth. Spread over cooled puff. Refrigerate for 20 min.; spread with whipped topping, cover, refrigerate. Drizzle with chocolate just before serving. Refrigerate leftovers.

—Vanessa Wales, *Holy Trinity, West Columbia, SC*

# The 75ers' Spring Party

Here in Fond du Lac, we are blessed with a large group of members who are over the age of 75. This is a very special group of people. They are the founding members of Luther Memorial Church and School. At Christmas time and in Spring, we celebrate them.

This is my first year helping with this gathering. One of the wonderful Christian ladies who helped start the celebrations has been a member of the group for a while. The other beautiful Christian woman will attain that magical age sometime between the spring and Christmas celebrations. She asked me if I would be interested in helping out this time, and then be in charge of the whole thing in December. Boy, am I glad I said yes.

The theme had already been chosen: Pets. So, everything we did focused around the theme. The invitations were cut in the shape of a cute dog, and had yarn glued on (all by hand by the retiring committee member). The table snack this year was "puppy chow" which we put in dog dishes (new ones). The school children decorated rocks with felt, google eyes, paint and markers... "Pet Rocks" for the 75ers to take home if they wished. Five different kinds of sandwiches were fixed for the refreshments (there were 4 other Ladies from Church who helped set up the day before, or made sandwiches and served them the day of the party and helped with clean up).

The day started with Pastor having a devotion based on Psalm 23. The members then sang hymn 436, The Lord's My Shepherd. Then, Pastor's son, Tom, played the piano while his Dad sang Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us. When they finished, the school children sang 4 songs, most of which had an animal theme. Mrs. Krause's piano students played pieces they had prepared for the day. Then, the K-2 Children presented a special rendition of Old McDonald, accompanied by Adam Johnson (6th grader) on guitar. It was cute!

Then we recognized Mrs. Rhoda Krause, for her service to the group parties since their inception. Those of you who may know her will appreciate the fact that she wants no recognition for her service. She was given a hanging Petunia plant.

There was more fun as the members spent time reminiscing about the pets from their past. There were even stories about those animals that were used on the family farms. These people were alive when horses and oxen were still used for farming—The stories the people can tell! I wished we would have been taping that part. It is very special to see a slice of life from 60 or 70+ years ago.

Then we ate our sandwiches, drank the coffee, and spent time chatting. The whole afternoon was over by 3:30.

I am looking forward to the Christmas Party already, and have been mulling different Christmas related themes in my head. I can't wait to spend time that way with them again. As I posted on Phileo talk, I am always open to any suggestions or theme ideas for our get-togethers.

—Chris Gerbitz, Luther Memorial, Fond du Lac, WI

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**"There is a grand fearlessness in faith. He who in his heart of hearts reverences the good, the true, the holy—that is, reverences God—does not tremble at the apparent success of attacks upon the outworks of faith. They may shake those who rest on those outworks—they do not move him whose soul reposes on the truth itself. He needs no prop or crutches to support his faith. Founded on a Rock, Faith can afford to gaze undismayed at the approaches of Infidelity."**

—Frederick W. Robertson, 1816–1853

# Caring for Aging Parents

**M**y mother, Lallah Drafts, went to her heavenly home in January of 2003. I, along with my siblings, had the privilege of caring for my mother the last year and a half of her life. I aim to share experiences of learning about life, love, thankfulness, and most unexpectedly navigating the health care system. This is my perspective only, and I hope it will in some way be useful to you.

Life...we all tend to get entirely too wrapped up in our own earthly life at times. How many days did I ride by my mother's home on my way home from work and had too much to do to stop? How many times did she leave a message on my answering machine at work to say, "I baked bread (or vegetable soup or green beans) today; stop by on your way home and get some"? I thought she did this because she wanted to be helpful to me, a working mother, but, was it a means to get a little of my time? I have much to learn and God allowed me to have time to spend with her before she died. It wasn't the kind of time I would have chosen, but it was quality time and it was a privilege to have it. Did I learn anything?

Love...what is the greatest love one can share? What a blessing from my heavenly Father to have had a Christian mother who lived and shared her faith. She was a humble servant whom God used to touch many lives. God gives us all gifts and her gifts included hospitality and sharing. She recognized the need for called workers and she encouraged the young people in our congregation. She prayed for (and cooked for) and delighted in the work of called workers in our church and throughout the CLC. Among the blessings I had while caring for her was being able to take her to church and seeing her joy in being there, reading and sharing God's word with her, and listening to her pray at night. Did I learn anything?

Thankfulness...it's hard to be thankful when you're watching your loved one decline in health and mental status. However, God tells us, "In all things give thanks." It becomes obvious as one looks back on events, all one has for which to be thankful. In my case, I had supportive, loving siblings and other family members. Each one gave, as they were able, in time, resources, and/or encouragement. God is merciful and He also provided trustworthy, loving caretakers who gave episodic relief when so desperately needed at a reasonable cost. Did I learn anything?

Navigating the health care system...I am a nurse, so one would think this would be easy for me. Wrong! I had so much to learn. I'm convinced it's not easy for anyone. Some of the things I learned:

- Most states/counties have some sort of Commission on Aging. They have contacts for sitters and agencies that can help you. Contact your community resources and start asking questions.
- There are agencies for family support when care-taking that can provide you with support (financial and emotional)– check out your yellow pages.
- The Alzheimer's Association will help with any confused person, even without an official diagnosis of Alzheimer's.
- Most hospitals and home health agencies have social workers that can help you if you give them the correct information.
- Many drug companies will provide senior citizens with help for prescription drugs if you apply directly to them.
- "Professional" sitters know lots about caring for people at home based on their previous experiences. They will give you information about helpful equipment and places to get help you might otherwise never know.
- Take the first or last appointment of the day at the doctor's office; you won't stay there as long.

*Continued on next page.*

## *Caring for Aging Parents—Continued*

If receiving physical therapy or occupational therapy through home health, it is imperative for you to learn "how to" for days when they are not there. The patient must show improvement or the service will be discontinued by Medicare. This means caretaker and patient have to work hard every day.

Your local hospital may have a community library or other patient education materials available. One of the ones we found helpful was "Caring for the Dying Patient".

If you can't take care of your loved one at home, visit them often no matter how fine the facility is...they still need you!

Other tidbits to know:

- Pray! Pray! Pray! And often!
- Find out if your loved one has a living will and make sure you know their wishes...before you need to know.
- Always use the seat belt on the wheelchair!
- Accept the help people give and be thankful, never critical. We all have different gifts and cannot expect the same from everyone.
- There always has to be a back-up plan. You never know when the person supposed to do the care taking will get sick, have car wreck, etc. Develop a system for backup.
- Use a medication planner (available at your local drugstore) so everyone knows which meds have been given and what is due.
- Keep a notepad and write down meals, baths, BM's, etc. so you know how long it's been.
- Don't underestimate what you or other family members can learn to do.
- Altered mental status can take away filters. Expect your loved one to say anything to anyone!
- Keeping a sense of humor is a must!

No one said life is fair. God is good and He knows what we need. It's in the Valleys we grow most.

Did I learn anything? I know I'm still learning. I know I learned that I'm not in charge and for that I am most thankful! If I learned anything else worthy of sharing, I hope I've passed it along to you!

*—Trudy Wales, Grace, Fridley, MN*

## A New Year, A New Look

**Summer greetings, dear sisters! If you are reading this, you've obviously noticed a change in our look this issue. We are trying a different printer and format for this subscription year (through next April's issue). You'll notice the non-glossy feel, the expanded length, and more color throughout. There is some cost savings for this type of printing, and the printer is one of our members in SW Minnesota. To top it off, all the mailing can be done through this print house and sent to each of you in a more time- and cost-effective way. Please take a moment now or later this subscription year and let us know what you think of the look!**

**You are receiving this issue at the address you have designated on your subscription form. If you want to change your mailing address, please let us know. You can reach Tina Eichstadt, the Business Manager, at: [teichstadt@charter.net](mailto:teichstadt@charter.net), (507) 344-0898, or 417 Woodhaven Lane, Mankato, MN 56001. She can't wait to hear from you!**

# *It's In The Valleys I Grow*

Sometimes life seems hard to bear,  
Full of sorrow, trouble and woe.  
It's then I have to remember  
That it's in the valleys I grow.

If I always stayed on the mountain top  
And never experienced pain,  
I would never appreciate God's love  
And would be living in vain.

I have so much to learn  
And my growth is very slow,  
Sometimes I need the mountaintops,  
But it's in the valleys I grow.

I do not always understand  
Why things happen as they do,  
But I am very sure of one thing.  
My Lord will see me through.

My little valleys are nothing  
When I picture Christ on the cross.  
He went through the valley of death;  
His victory was Satan's loss.

Forgive me, Lord, for complaining  
When I'm feeling so very low.  
Just give me a gentle reminder  
That it's in the valleys I grow.

Continue to strengthen me, Lord,  
And use my life each day  
To share your love with others  
And help them find their way.

Thank you for the valleys, Lord  
For this one thing I know  
The mountaintops are glorious  
But it's in the valleys I grow!

*—Trudy Wales, Grace, Fridley, MN*

## News & Notes

The Gethsemane Lutheran Church Women of Spokane, Washington have published a new cookbook this past year. They would like to make it available to all sister congregations and friends of the CLC. The cookbook is filled with over 200 delicious recipes. It is bound in a small three-ring binder to allow for the addition of extra sheets. The GLCW hope you enjoy the recipes as much as they do. The cookbooks cost \$14 per book, which includes shipping fees. Checks can be made out to the GLCW. To order, you may contact us either by email or send a written request to the church. Thank you and God Bless!

### **The Gethsemane Lutheran Church Women**

11315 E. Broadway  
Spokane Valley, WA 99206

*ekarnitz@hotmail.com*  
*lindseysommer@yahoo.com*

**Look for a recipe from Gethsemane's cookbook in the  
coming October issue: Bavarian Apple Torte!**

# Call Her Blessed

**"Her children rise up and call her blessed."**

—Proverbs 31:28

Dear Mom,

Enclosed with this letter you will find a lot of memories. Some are good and some are not as good. Like the time that you spanked me for pretending to shoot the ushers during the offering at church. But I hear about that today and I shake my head and laugh. Others I'd rather forget, because they were not so amusing, even this many years later. I'd rather forget them, if it were not that in those times of my disobedience and your subsequent discipline you taught me the difference between right and wrong: the difference between God's Commandments and the sinful wishes of a sinner. I'd rather forget them, except that in these things you also taught me eternally valuable lessons about confession, repentance, and God's forgiveness in Christ.

I'm not going to list all of the good memories, because there are too many for me to do so. But I'm sure that many of these will come out in my thoughts in this Mother's Day letter to you. The Proverbs say that, "Strength and honor are (a mother's) clothing. She shall rejoice in time to come" (31:25). Whether good memories or bad, I pray that all of your memories of watching your children grow still bring you joy, for you have been a blessing to us.

Enclosed you will find my thankfulness for you. Proverbs tell us that, "(A mother's) children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her" (31:28). We can't choose who our mother will be. A mother is, in more ways than one, a gift from God. And, even though I didn't always show it, even though I still don't show it as I should, I give thanks to God that He saw fit to place me in your care. I know that the Bible says that children are a heritage and a reward from the Lord (Psalms 127:3), but I am thankful for your patience with me even when my actions made the experience less than rewarding. Psychologists say that every man looks for his mother in the woman that he chooses for a wife. I don't know how true that is, but I am thankful that you gave me a benchmark by which to evaluate a suitable mother of my children. And so, while I give thanks to God for my wife, I also give thanks to you and to her mother, for all of those things that make her such a blessing to me and to my kids.

Every night you led us in prayer before we went to bed, teaching us by your godly example to "exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be...for all men, for kings and all who are in authority." (1 Timothy 2:1ff). Although, when I grew older, you and Dad told me that I needed to move beyond my childhood prayers, they still form the foundation of my evening prayers. Not a night goes by that I do not offer my prayers and think of gathering with you and my sisters and saying, "Now I lay me down to sleep..." Enclosed with this letter you will find my prayers for you, that the Lord would continue to bless you through your husband, your children, and your grandchildren, as well as your church family.

Enclosed you will find God's blessings upon you, for you have been a blessing to me as I have grown in my faith. Indeed, you and Dad had a role in the origin of my faith in that it was you who brought me to Baptism to receive this Means of Grace. You made me go to church and Sunday School, even when I didn't want to, so that it became the most useful habit that I have. By your example you taught me so much about the application of God's Word in our daily lives. God gave me the blessings of a Christian education and Christian family through you, and I pray that He would bless you with His grace. While no one is perfect, you and I are perfect in Christ Jesus, and, without you and Dad, I don't know how God would have brought that Gospel sanctification into my life. Above all of the other blessings of my childhood, the Savior has blessed me through you in that you have blessed me with the Savior through the sharing of His Word. You are a blessing from God.

I hope that you have also found the love that is enclosed with this letter. Yes, I forgot your Mother's Day card again this year, but I hope you have found this to be even better.

With Christian Love, Your Son

—Rev. Joel Fleischer, Calvary, Marquette, MI

## Letters to the Editor

The last issue of *The Branches* was great, as always. I especially enjoyed the article about writing "Thank You" notes in the previous issue. Such a lost "art!" Letter writing too. Mary Robert E. Lee was a great letter-writer, and many were saved and used in Perry's book (see Book Reviews). But—she was a lady!

—Edith Haertl, Holy Cross, Phoenix, AZ

You are definitely providing a blessing through *The Branches*. Thank you—prayers and blessings.

—Nancy Battig, Holy Cross, Phoenix, AZ

Once again I appreciated reading *The Branches*. Thanks for all the effort put into it. I just renewed my subscription and purchased three additional subscriptions as gifts.

—Ruth Ahrens, Grace, Valentine, NE

First of all, I would like to thank you for *The Branches*. Each issue has been so uplifting and helpful to me in my faith life. A big thank you to all the women who have submitted such fine work as well. Also, I had an idea for you to consider for the remaining three issues of 2005-2006. Reflections of Love, Reflections of Hope, Reflections of Faith.

—Vanessa Wales, Holy Trinity, West Columbia, SC

**"Love sought  
is good,  
but given unsought  
is better."**

—William Shakespeare,  
1564-1616



## A Look Ahead

### Upcoming Themes Announced

The October 2005 issue of *The Branches* will be based around the theme "Reflections of Love." Articles should be sent by mid-August to ensure they are received in time. The January 2006 theme is: "Reflections of Hope." April's theme is: "Reflections of Faith."

## Writer's Guide

For those of you who would like more guidance on how to submit articles, here it is! Submissions may include anything appropriate for family consumption. Attempt to address the upcoming theme or a certain established section. Ideas include: hobbies, projects, ideas, tips, essays, reports, stories, poetry, recipes, trivia, humor, reviews, suggested articles, questions, pen-pal requests, memories, biographies, autobiographies, and prayer requests. Keep information, announcements, and prayer requests timely. All submissions are subject to editing and pastoral review. Inclusion of any article is subject to space available.

Email and regular mail are both accepted. Please include your name, congregation, town, state, and contact information. Handwritten material is fine if it is readable. You may title your own work. Most submissions should be limited to one page. Nothing is too short. If quoting another source, please give credit where it is due.

### Send submissions to:

Abby Matzke • P.O. Box 238 • Stambaugh, MI 49964 • abby\_matzke@yahoo.com



P.O. Box 238  
Stambaugh, MI 49964

***I am the Vine,  
you are the branches.  
He who abides in Me,  
and I in him,  
bears much fruit;  
for without Me  
you can do nothing.***

—John 15:5

## Hymn 439

**O God of mercy, God of might,  
In love and pity infinite,  
Teach us, as ever in Thy sight,  
To live our life to Thee.**



## Publication Information

### Editor

Abby Matzke, P.O. Box 238, Stambaugh, MI 49964,  
E-mail [abby\\_matzke@yahoo.com](mailto:abby_matzke@yahoo.com)

### Business Manager

Tina Eichstadt, 417 Woodhaven Lane, Mankato, MN 56001,  
E-mail [teichstadt@charter.net](mailto:teichstadt@charter.net)

### Primary Pastoral Reviewer

Rev. Philip Matzke, P.O. Box 238, Stambaugh, MI 49964,  
E-mail [stpeters\\_clc@yahoo.com](mailto:stpeters_clc@yahoo.com)

*The Branches* (ISSN 1552-9150) is published quarterly by the women of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). All Scripture is from the New King James Version. *The Branches* is not an official publication of the CLC.

All submissions should be sent to Abby Matzke. All subscription information should be sent to Tina Eichstadt.

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### Artwork and Layout

Debbie Olson