

faithforward

stories of faith from Faith.

october 2021



The Mission of Faith The People of Faith

Harriet's Legacy

**THE ETERNAL
FLAME**

Amy's Ordination

SET APART

Ending Racism

**JIM CROW IN
MINNESOTA**

A PUBLICATION OF FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH FOREST LAKE

faithforward

is a publication on the mission and ministry of Faith Lutheran Church.

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ON THE COVER: The people of Faith Lutheran Church.

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Faith Lutheran: A People on A Mission

Faith Lutheran Church, the building, is an important place for ministry to happen. It's been that way for over 133 years.

Faith Lutheran Church, the people, have a mission that we're led by the Spirit to share God's grace. It's a new statement, but a message that speaks into our future.

But how were we led during the pandemic when the building wasn't our primary gathering place? We continued to live out the call to minister to each other and be the church for the community and the world. I'm proud to serve a church that cares as much as you do.

This October issue of Faith Forward is a celebration of the timeless ministry of this congregation. We see where God has stirred up the hearts of call in our members to become ordained clergy. We hear stories of lay leaders advancing ministry inside our building and out.

Many of you have told me that what you especially appreciate about Faith are the opportunities to stay connected while worshiping at home. I continue to see leaders make the aesthetics of worship come alive and inspire us.

Daniel Diemer, a leader on our tech team, intentionally looked at the sanctuary by considering camera angles and blocking how the service would run.

"Knowing that the only way to experience church was online, I tried hard to think of the viewer's experience in planning the audio-visual aspect of the service," said Diemer. "What would I want to see and hear to make it seem like I was actually sitting in the sanctuary? Then we did our best to make it happen."

Ann Sargeant, a leader on our design team, considers the building as something moveable and changeable. "We get caught up in what is sacred, and we confuse it with static," she said. "We are all temporary tenants, at best, in this place. If we are only doing something that is for now, we preclude anybody else from inhaling new ideas, new thoughts, and new people."

I asked Ann how she saw Faith respond when the pandemic happened.

"People showed up. We worked together. New alliances formed and not at the expense of old ones. It was new and exciting," she said. "I'm proud of how we did this."

Church is different, but Ann has seen her own lens shift. "I have missed people, but I don't miss worship because I'm getting the full embodiment of church at home. I love singing out loud and speaking prayers out loud. We aren't growing through bricks and mortar. Technology is



allowing our church to really grow!”

Sargeant states building maintenance is important, but that doesn’t have to be at the cost of looking at things differently. “We’re meant to upkeep this building, but also to be as fluid and welcome to change as the Creator of the universe,” she said. “It reflects what Faith is—because we will change drastically in our lives.”

As Ann would say, we don’t know what’s going to happen next, but that can be a strength. “Design allows us to respond to what’s going on and always maintain that this is a living embodiment to Christ in action,” she said.

The Spirit truly is leading us forward in faith in an ever-changing world.

~Pastor John

Harriet and the Eternal Flame

Over the last 40 years, you might have looked up to the ceiling of the sanctuary and saw a flame burning brightly above the altar. Then this summer, it seemed to disappear. What happened to it and why was it there in the first place?

The story of the Eternal Flame traces back to the early 1980s. Faith member Harriet Ostrum donated the Eternal Flame in memory of her husband Webb. She was retired and ready to move to Washington state to live near her son.

In 1981, Faith member Dan McPhail was the head of maintenance and he received a call from Harriet asking if he would take care of the flame. "Harriet had been my sixth-grade elementary teacher," Dan said. "I told her I would be happy to do this for her."

Dan ordered a year supply of seven-day candles and week after week lowered the flame down from the ceiling year after year for 32 years until he retired in 2013. "I thought about Harriet every time I lowered it (the flame)," Dan said.

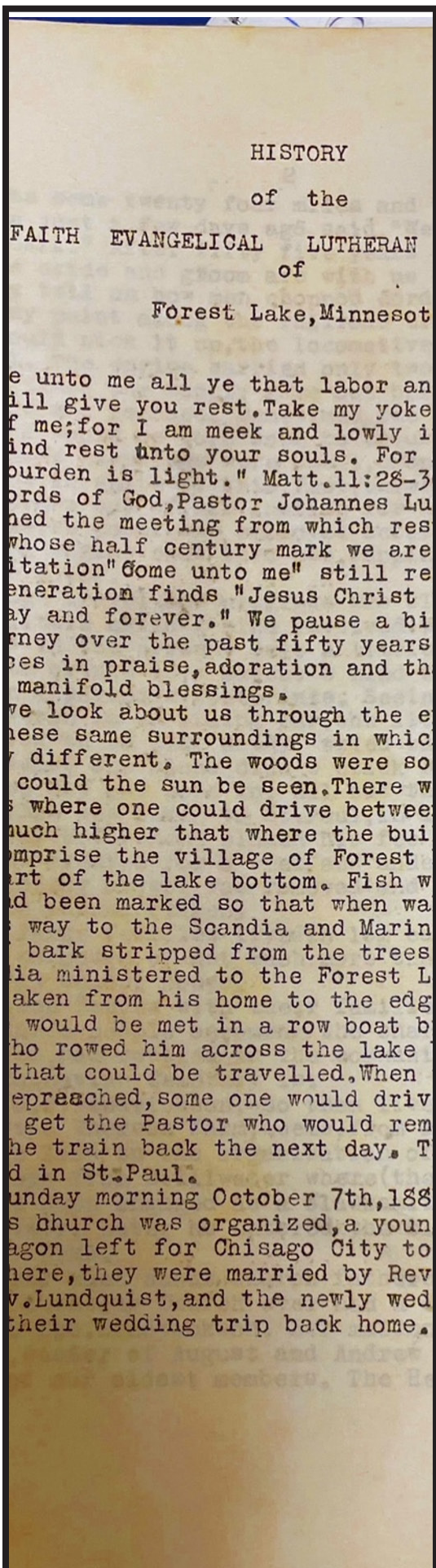
So where has the flame gone? After decades of being hoisted up and down, the pulley is down to its last thread. "The pastors and worship leaders were directly below," Dan said. Glenn Terry, a member of faith who is an artist, is commissioned to repurpose the candle so that it can become a safe fixture in the sanctuary again.

Dan looks forward to the day when the eternal flame is in the sanctuary again. "I will be glad to see it back," he said. "Mrs. Ostrom and the Eternal Flame are very special to me."

-Dennis Sanders



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Today is Tomorrow's History

When Faith Lutheran celebrated their 100th anniversary in 1988 many interesting historical items were collected to make a Faith History Room in what was then the Fireplace Room. After the anniversary many of those involved wondered what to do with these items and that was the basis for the formation of a Heritage Committee. On May 16, 1991 the Heritage Committee of Faith Lutheran met for the first time and has now been a committee at Faith for 30 years.

The Heritage Committee goals are to collect, preserve and share the heritage of Faith Lutheran. One of the ways we have acted on these goals is through several displays throughout the church that share Faith's history with its members and visitors.

We continue to share information with families doing genealogy research. In addition to updating and maintaining displays, some of our highlights include a Faith Heritage cookbook, a power point presentation at a Faith Fellowship luncheon, a 125th anniversary coloring/activity book for children and a 125th Anniversary DVD of Faith's history, committees and anniversary year events.

An interesting discovery by the committee happened in 2006 while putting up a temporary display on charter/founding families, we noticed a discrepancy in the list of family members and traced it back to a 50th anniversary book from 1938 that had a typing error. There was no August Olson listed in Faith's charter members book because it should have been August Alm.

In October the committee will have the privilege of adding Reverend Amy Mihelich Smith to the Sons and Daughter of Faith Display. This display consists of confirmed members of Faith who have been ordained. Amy will be the eleventh member of Faith to be added to this display. A wonderful heritage for Faith Lutheran.

We will continue to record Faith's history by collecting the pictures, items and information that we receive from the church and the church members. Today is tomorrow's history!

Submitted by Donna Peterson

Set Apart

The vocational journey of Amy Mihelich Smith



Professional photos of Amy by Judd Sather of Judd Sather Photography.

A special ritual occurs when a leader in the Lutheran church completes their studies to become an ordained clergy. It's called an ordination—literally being set apart or made holy.

Faith is thrilled to affirm the calling to ministry of one of our members, Amy Mihelich Smith, who grew up in Forest Lake. She was ordained on Saturday, October 2nd, at Saint Andrews Lutheran Church in Mahtomedi. Her first call will be as the teaching pastor at one of the largest ELCA churches in the state.

"I will teach the children, youth, and families through confirmation and Sunday school," said Mihelich Smith. "I'll also spend time in worship leadership and pastoral care."

Mihelich Smith attributes her time at Faith to helping plant the seeds for ministry.

As a young girl, Amy went to church with her mom, Dana. A pivotal moment, however, came when she was in 2nd grade. "My dad, [Todd], became a Christian and was baptized. I was the reader at his baptism. Church definitely took on a new meaning."

Church transformed from being something fun to do with her mom to a shared journey of meaning with her whole family. "He had a paper with the Lord's Prayer, Psalm 23, and John 3:16," said Mihelich Smith. "He took on this new role as a spiritual mentor and it was a big identity time to figure out what this was going to look like."



Her family started going to church all the time. “We were always volunteering,” she said. “One of my favorites was that we made a goal to read in church 12 times [a year]. They let us tag team—I’d read one lesson and he’d read the other. It was a skill that Faith helped develop!”

“In 3rd grade, Faith did a drawing for a free week of Bible camp,” she said. “If you memorized Bible verses, you got more chances to win. I won and got to go to Luther Crest [Bible Camp, near Alexandria, MN].”

Mihelich Smith would go on to work at Luther Crest in the summers while she attended St. Olaf College.

“I got to take this developing faith of mine to a new place,” she said. “[Church] wasn’t a requirement anymore, and quite frankly, I understood why it was important to learn about grace and I rebuilt my faith with a more expansive and inclusive idea of God and God’s radical love.”

After college, Michelich Smith had the opportunity to live in Rwanda for a year with an ELCA program called Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM). One of the people that Amy looked up to at Faith was Colleen Peterson. Peterson had served in YAGM and was a huge influence on Amy deciding to go. As a teacher, one of her jobs was to teach a Bible study for theology students

as they built up their vocabulary. Jokingly, they called her pastor. This experience, upon reflection, helped shape her external call.

“When I got back from YAGM, I preached at all the churches that supported me,” she said. “I learned a lot about accompaniment and I had to learn how to help people understand what I’d been through. I gained a lot of empathy and understanding for people who didn’t always have the opportunity to ask questions or feel like they’ll get ‘cancelled’ if they asked them—I was a safe place for them to ask.”

There was a huge reverse culture shock for Amy regarding diversity and inclusion. “I felt like ‘I get it’, why doesn’t everyone?” she said. “Accompanying our neighbor is so important and sometimes the hardest neighbor to walk with is the one right here, [who’s been here all along].”

Amy appreciated getting to preach about her experience at Faith. “It was so generous of Faith to welcome me back,” said Mihelich Smith. “I was so excited to share my stories and this amazing experience.”

But when she returned to Minnesota in 2017, Mihelich Smith was not expecting to be a pastor. Instead, she embarked on the journalist career that she studied at St. Olaf.

“I was at the Sun ThisWeek in Apple Valley,” she said. “The thing I like as a journalist is listening to

people and telling their stories to bring to light the truth. In 2017, people were not always open to the truth. I realized I wanted to do this in a more relational way. I was walking with people through their journeys and their debates.”

She decided to enroll in a class at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul called Dismantling Racism. She was hooked. In May 2021, she graduated with a Master of Divinity with a concentration in justice and reconciliation.

While studying to become a pastor, Mihelich Smith spent a year at Saint Andrews as an intern pastor—learning how to do the work under the guidance of Executive Pastor Sarah Breckenridge. “She’s incredibly well-rounded, she brings her journalism, poetry, and global missions experience to this calling,” said Breckenridge. “Amy is an engaging teacher whose preaching is informed by her background. She’s such a gift to the community.”

Michelich Smith will immediately apply her journalism skills to helping people understand their calling in the world and their call to love their neighbor.

“When we focus on the fact that there’s a lot going on in the world and the Twin Cities, one of our jobs is to equip people to respond in love,” said Mihelich Smith. “A lot of what we get to do here is helping people expand the understanding of who their neighbor is.”

Pastor John Straiton, who recently retired as the visitation pastor at Saint Andrews, gave Mihelich Smith advice while she was an intern. “If you’re teaching the gospel, someone will always be offended... and somebody comforted.”

“Everyone has problems and struggles,” said Mihelich Smith. “[As a pastor], I help give people a place to grieve together, grow together, and lean on each other.”

Amy didn’t envision moving back to the suburbs, but she thinks one of the gifts of growing up at Faith was how our congregation prepared her to serve in a context that is politically and socially diverse. “One of the gifts of growing up at Faith Lutheran is you equipped me to speak to this culture in ways that people can hear,” she said.

Her voice will be a gift for Saint Andrews and the surrounding community in the years to come.

She’s been set apart to respond to God’s call. There is holy work ahead of her.

-By Pastor John Klawiter



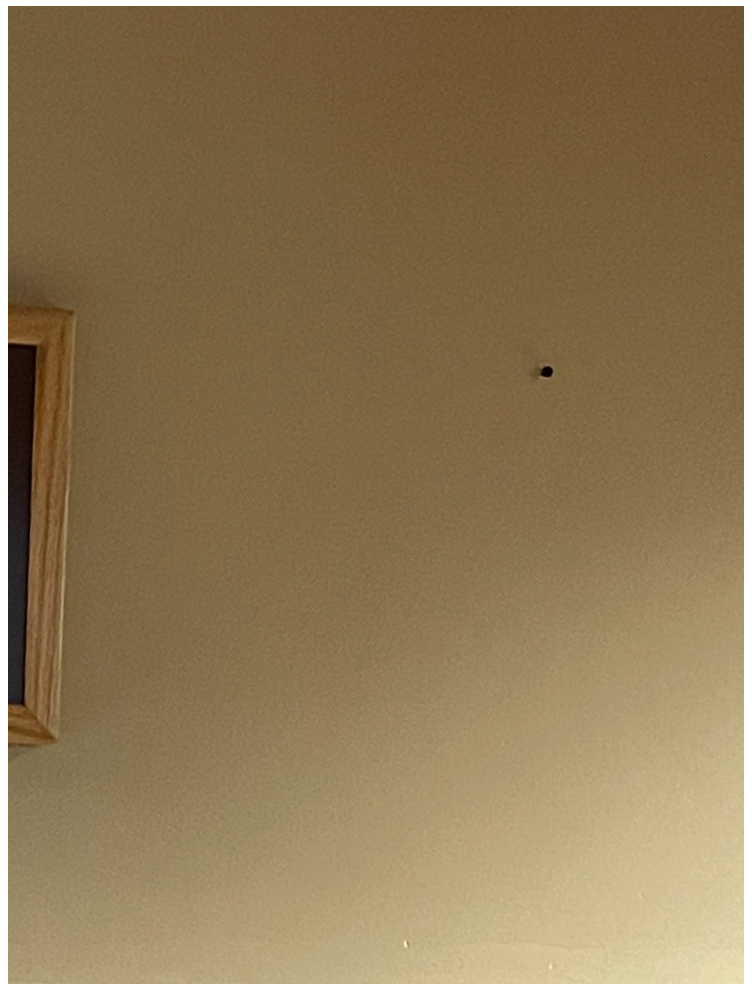
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Sons & Daughters of Faith



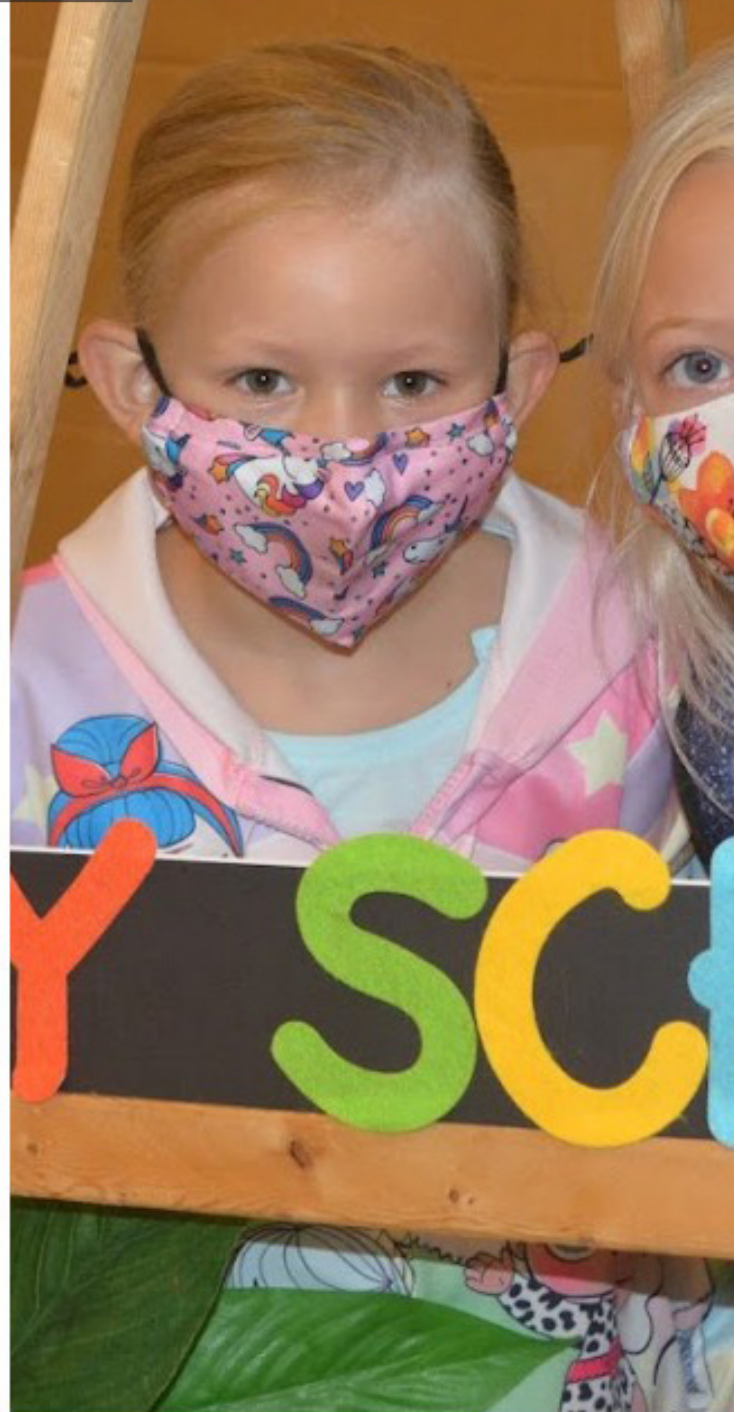
When a member of a congregation is ordained, that person is considered a son or daughter of the congregation. Since the founding of Faith Lutheran Church there have been nine women and men that have been given this honor. On October 2, Amy Mihelich Smith became the tenth child of the congregation. Like the nine pictured above, Amy's will have her photograph displayed in the church lobby. In fact, a nail is already up ready to receive Amy's portrait and become an example of how all Christians ordained or not can respond to God's calling to serve.





The rains of late August couldn't stop us from our Faith Fall Kickoff on August 29! Backpacks were blessed and we got to hear the Christmas story a bit early as we began our sermon series "The Stories We Live...With A Twist". What a great day to kick off Sunday School!

Faith Fall Kickoff





**Don't let confirmation
be a graduation!**

We interviewed Marlene Elmstrom about her calling as a minister and her return to Faith as she entered retirement.

First some basics: when were you ordained and where did you serve?

I'm what is often referred to as a second career pastor. I was ordained at Faith Lutheran on June 14, 1994. My first call was Associate Pastor for Tracy Lutheran Church in Tracy, MN. In 2002 I accepted the call to be Lead Pastor for First English Lutheran Church in Ortonville, MN. I retired in 2013. From 2014 through the end of 2019, I served as Interim Pastor for four congregations: Paynesville Lutheran, Paynesville, MN; Faith Lutheran, Becker, MN; Salem Lutheran, St. Cloud; and Rejoice Lutheran in Clearwater, MN.

Where and when did you feel a call to ministry?

I think the call actually began when I was young. But at that time women were just beginning to be included in ordained ministry. So, when asked what I wanted to do when I grew up, I said I wanted to marry a pastor. It wasn't until our youngest was ready to graduate from high school that the call became clear. While my heart said go for it, my head said, "I need a sign!" And God did just that. A very compassionate and faith-filled couple who were what I would call "quiet members" of Faith at the time, heard that I was struggling with whether or not I should go to seminary. So they offered to pay a significant portion of the cost should I choose to go to the seminary. Choose? Once that happened there was no choice.

How did your time at Faith as a child inform that call?

Both as a child and as an adult, Faith continued to provide opportunities for me to grow deeper in faith. While some can point to a particular person as the mentor that made a difference in their life, I have been blessed to have too many to mention: beautiful, loving and dedicated SS, Vacation Bible School, and confirmation teachers, affirming pastors, choir directors and members, compassionate and caring neighbors who not only invited and took me to Sunday School and church, but provided support, prayers, hot dishes and baked goods when my mother was sick for a very long time.

What made you decide to come back to Faith as a member?

Faith has been "home" for me since I was a child. I was baptized in the original church build-

ing as an almost three-year-old child – so I remember it! My confirmation class was the first to affirm their baptismal promises in the current sanctuary. We (mostly) raised our children at Faith. (My husband is retired military, so we were away at times.)

So, of course, when after a long search we found just the right home for us in this area, there was no question that we wanted to share in the community of Faith once again!

How does it feel to be a member after serving in other churches?

It has been delightful to share at Faith once again! I'm grateful that the Holy Spirit has opened up opportunities for both my husband and I to share and serve. I LOVE being a part of the adult outreach ministry that makes phone calls or sends cards and notes to elderly and homebound members, many of whom I know or have some connection with from the past. And what a gift to be able to sing with the choir!

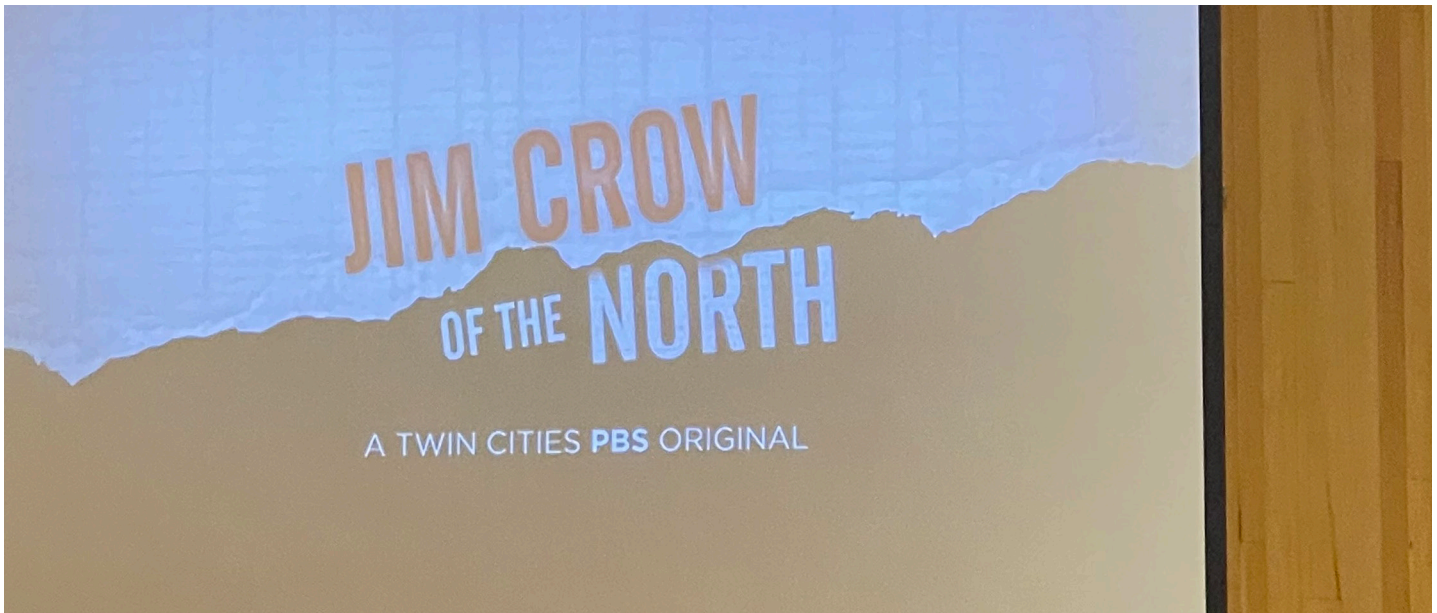
What would you say to the 2022 confirmands who are thinking about their faith and how to serve God?

Don't let confirmation be a graduation! Because when it comes to faith, none of us ever stop learning or growing! Continue to be involved, to challenge the status quo, to wonder and question how what you are doing impacts the life of your neighbor as well as the life of God's good creation. I can assure you that sometime in the future, when you're least expecting it, something will happen in your life where you'll remember how a lesson, a verse, a classmate, a teacher, an experience made a difference.

How should they explore where God is calling them?

Continue to be involved in the life of Faith, of course! Be brave enough to try new things and make new friends. Because sometimes the answers we need or the direction we need to take is given more clearly in the times when things don't work out as we thought they should rather than in when they do. And most importantly, continue to have lots of conversations with God, sometimes using the conversation of silence in order to make sense out of the challenges that surround us – in order to hear or come to recognize the presence of "God with us," always!

ASPIRE to End Racism



ASPIRE is a new committee at Faith Lutheran Church in Forest Lake that formed in late February of 2021 dedicated to and focused on issues of inclusion, social justice, and equity. ASPIRE stands for Advocating, Serving, and Promoting Inclusion and Racial Equity and our mission statement is: “We aspire to promote diversity and inclusiveness at Faith Lutheran Church, respecting the equal dignity of each person and seeking the image of God in all people throughout our community and world.”

On, September 28th, 2021, ASPIRE successfully held their first in-person event showing the TPT documentary, “Jim Crow of the North” in the sanctuary with small group discussion afterwards. There were twenty in-person folks, as well as another handful of people who participated via ZOOM. This documentary teaches about the history of racial covenants and redlining right here in Minnesota going back to 1909, continuing through the mid to late 1960s, and the far-reaching impacts of these practices that affect us all still today. In 2008, USA Today ranked Minneapolis as one of the worst to live in for black people, citing the impact of these early 20th century restrictive covenants on 21st century disparities. Minnesota has the largest gap of home ownership in the nation in terms of percentage, in which 75% of white people own the home they live in while only 25% of black people own the home they live in. Nationally, the average white household in the United States has ten times as much wealth as the average black household.

These are real and direct effects of racism, racial covenants, and redlining. It was as purposeful and intentional as it was wrong. As stated in the documentary: “Racial Covenants did the work of Jim Crow in the North- all over the North... Racial covenants aren’t just about discriminating against people of color, it’s about enriching white people... It speaks to the ways that White Supremacy has been embedded and really built structures and built environments.”

The reason we chose “Jim Crow of the North” as something to share with the congregation is because it speaks directly to racism right here in Minnesota and the profound implications that exist still today in our systems, infrastructures, and society as a whole. Education, acknowledgement, and empathy are the best remedies we have against ignorance and racism and the education most of us received has been incomplete and has fallen quite short of both acknowledgment and empathy. It’s important we take an honest inventory of our history and use what we learn to do and be better with our words and actions. As people of Faith, we are moved by the spirit of God to do as He tells us in Micah 6:8: “Act Justly, Love Mercy, and Walk Humbly with Your God”.

ASPIRE and Cherish Our Children invite you to the play WHITE PRIVILEGE at Faith Lutheran Church October 24th, 3:00 pm.



Racial Covenant: Covenants were embedded in property deeds all over the country to keep people who were not white from buying or even occupying land.

Redlining: The systematic denial of various services to residents of specific, often racially associated, neighborhoods or communities, either explicitly or through the selective raising of prices.

A Leap of Faith



“Is it a good time to think about taking a leap of Faith?” Memorial Prayer Garden chairperson, Sue Gort, set the vision by posing this question church leadership in December of 2020. Yes! It was time for a second columbarium.

What a thrill to see this vision become reality!

In March our purchase agreement was signed.

In April the foundation, poured in 2008 and then covered in pavers, was revealed.

The foundation was completed in July.

In August the columbarium, manufactured in Crookston, Minnesota, finally arrived!

Two installers worked for two days in intense heat. Great job, guys. Thank you!

Brick siding and new pavers were installed in late August and early September by a talented local contractor.

The finished product is absolutely stunning! Watch for information on a dedication service on All Saint's Sunday, November 7.

