

# PenPALS

NEWSLETTER

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December 2022



“You have a place with Him who promised to never leave you or forsake you...”

-Rev. Jonathan Manor



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### CHRISTMAS BLESSINGS TO YOU

We pray God's richest blessings to you and your family this Christmas season, as we rejoice together once again at the message of the birth of our Savior - the Good News of great joy for you!

*Glory to God in highest heav'n,  
Who unto us His Son has giv'n!  
While angels sing with pious mirth  
A glad new year to all the earth. LSB 358:15*

A very blessed Christmas and happy new year to you all from the Pastoral Ed/PALS Office! -Jim Baneck, Jonathan Manor, and Robyn Armbrust



# A PLACE FOR YOU



AND SHE GAVE BIRTH TO HER FIRSTBORN SON AND WRAPPED HIM IN SWADDLING CLOTHS AND LAID HIM IN A MANGER, BECAUSE THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR THEM IN THE INN. LUKE 2:7

It was Christmas Day 2015 and following worship we began our journey to visit family. After a long day of travel, we began to look for a place to stay for the night. The GPS identified hotels on our route, but all the rooms were taken - there was no room for us. Finally, we got ahold of a man in Lynchburg, South Carolina who said his hotel had a room for us. We pulled off the interstate onto the dark rural road and drove up to the flickering florescent light sign of the Relax Inn. Approaching the exterior plate glass-window, I spoke through the vented hole in the glass, and slid my credit card through the metal slot at the bottom. Surely my family would be okay in this place...right?

Do you know what that's like? Have you ever had times in your life when it feels like there's no place for you, or the place you're in doesn't feel comfortable or right? When your "friend" has betrayed your confidence, or when your political views or your Christian morals and beliefs are ridiculed publicly on social media or at work or at the extended family gathering? When relationships are strained, or when you're serving in a parish hundreds of miles from family and seminary friends, or when you're struggling with so many things in your life, but nobody seems to notice or care? You wonder, "Is there a place for me?" How difficult it is to wonder if there's a place for you.

Jesus knew a little about there being no place for Him. From the time He left His heavenly home, humbling Himself to take on human flesh - there did not seem to be a place for Him. "And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."

I wonder...is there a place for Him now? In a world where violence and hatred seem to rule the day? In this country that seems so divided? In this entitled society that puts self first no matter the cost or what's compromised? Is there a place for Jesus here and now?

Seems kind of bleak and dark at times, doesn't it? So it was for God's people who walked in darkness, awaiting the light of the long-promised Savior. So it seemed for Mary and Joseph that night in the little town of Bethlehem. There was no place for them, yet the place they were in, was just where they needed to be - for that time, for the people then, and for us.

"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger...And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger." There was a place by that manger with the Savior for those lowly shepherds.

The good news of great joy is for all the people - for the shepherds and the people who were walking in darkness - for the friend that turned out not to be and the politically obnoxious person. For the one living far from family and for the lonely and the hurting and the struggling - yes for you. No matter what lays heavy on your heart today - the Good News of great joy that you preach and that you hear is for you too. The good news of forgiveness for the repentant - the great joy of life and light for the lost.

All because your Lord and Savior knew what it meant to have no place for Him at His birth - no place for His teaching among the religious leaders - no place for His rightful claims that He was the Son of God. "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised." So they decided they would put Jesus in His place - a place nailed to a cross.

There He would die...with the sins of the world upon Him. Yet even in His death He had no place of His own to be laid, so He was laid in a borrowed tomb, wrapped in cloths once again. This time a burial shroud...His enemies confident that Jesus was now in His final place. But oh how wrong they were, because Jesus defeated those enemies - He conquered sin and death and Satan himself - He rose to life again to make room in His kingdom - to make a place for you. You have a place with Him who promised to never leave you or forsake you - a place of forgiveness - a place in eternity with all who believe in Him. As you live in those blessings now, there's a place of love and care and fellowship for you in the Body of Christ.

This is where He gives you daily bread when things look dark and bleak - gives you His holy Word that promises forgiveness and strength in the reality of unsettled times - gives you His gracious presence to see you through the isolation and loneliness - gives you the benefits of your baptism where you were washed clean...marked - claimed - redeemed as His child forever!

No matter what your place in life - no matter the valley of hardship you're walking through or the mountaintop of joy you're experiencing - no matter how many times you wonder and ask, "Is there a place for me?" - Jesus reminds you that there is always a place for you with Him.

A blessed Advent journey and Christmas celebration to you all!

Yours in our Savior, the Word become flesh to dwell among us,

*Jonathan*

Rev. Jonathan Manor, Director of PALS and Continuing Education





## NEWS FROM THE PALS FIELD

### WELCOME NEW FACILITATORS

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We are excited to welcome 2 new facilitating couples joining our PALS facilitating team!

**Pasor Jacob and Michelle May** are serving the **Missouri District East PALS** group. Pastor May is pastor at **Christ Lutheran Church** in **Gordonville, Missouri**.

**Pastor Scott and Wendy MacDonald** are serving the **New England District PALS** group. Pastor MacDonald is pastor at **St. John Lutheran Church** in **Meriden, Connecticut**.

We praise God for providing these faithful servants and look forward to working with them.

### PALS GATHERINGS

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PALS facilitators **Pastor Timothy and Heather McCarty** gathered their **Oklahoma District PALS** group together for a retreat this fall in Kingfisher, Oklahoma. The group studied PALS course, *Pastor's Life of Prayer* and shared in worship, meals and ample time for fellowship together. Babysitting was provided, and the **LWML** from **Emmanuel Lutheran** in **Kingfisher** provided lunch! Participants shared, "PALS is a very important program as I get my feet wet in the ministry, to be able to get feedback and grow in my calling." And another, "This weekend was great for support and networking!"

Words of encouragement from **North Wisconsin District PALS** participants who participated in the Fall PALS Retreat hosted by facilitators **Pastor Nate and Sarah Reichle**: One pastor's wife shared, "I really enjoyed meeting at **Camp Luther** and making meals together was great. I loved this location and the opportunities to connect with other wives." One pastor shared, "Having PALS is the best way to grow into your new vocation as pastor, pastor's wife, or pastor(s)' kids."

The **Wyoming District PALS** group recently gathered in **Thermopolis, Wyoming**. PALS facilitator, **Pastor Kenneth Mars** prepared and facilitated a wonderful time for worship, study, discussion and sharing. **Rev. Samuel Needham**, Pastor at host congregation, **St. Paul's Lutheran Church**, led Matins. PALS pastor, **Rev. Patrick Baldwin**, prepared and led a study & discussion on Part I "Concerning the Qualifications of the One Who Comes to a Position of Spiritual Leadership" in *The Book of Pastoral Rule* by St. Gregory the Great. PALS pastor, **Rev. Jacob Benson**, prepared and led a study and discussion on Part II "Concerning the Life of the Pastor" in *The Book of Pastoral Rule* by St. Gregory the Great.





**Pastor Stephen Wagner**, one of our **Texas District** PALS facilitators, met with his group in connection with their District Fall Pastors' Conference. Concordia Lutheran Church, San Antonio served as the host for both the conference and the PALS meeting. The group enjoyed a discussion on section 1 of Ted Kober's book, [Built on the Rock](#).

The **Minnesota South PALS** group met for a fall retreat at **Camp Omega**. PALS facilitator, **Rev. Stefan Wismar**, led these 4 couples through worship, study, and time for fellowship. Pastors worked through parish curriculum planning while wives enjoyed a separate time for study.



## INCENTIVE

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To the **first**, first year new PALS pastor or pastor's wife who notifies [Robyn.Armbrust@lcms.org](mailto:Robyn.Armbrust@lcms.org), informing her you've read this entire newsletter, we will send a \$25 CPH gift card. Please include your mailing address in your email.