

VOICE OF FAITH

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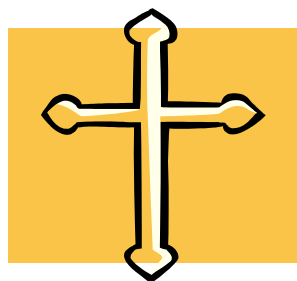
Special Points of Interest:

- *Congregational Meeting*
- *WELCA Retreat*
- *Mission Area Assembly*

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Faith Lutheran Church
1120 Silver Lane
East Hartford, CT. 06118
860-569-2037



From the Pastor:

Dear friends,

According to Luke (4:18-19), Jesus read these words from the scroll of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." He went on to tell the gathered people of his hometown, "today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." They were delighted with him for a few minutes. Then he pointed out that the good news his presence offered them was also for their nearby enemies, and they turned on him with violence.

In this Easter season, we have been reading I Peter. We're hoping to learn from him how the followers of Jesus should behave in a world that doesn't much care about the good news. We're hoping to learn how the experiences of the 1st-century church can inform us in the 21st century as we work together to make Jesus known. Like Jesus, Peter, and Paul, we are likely to be greeted with boredom or scorn when we offer the good news. The world has changed: the experiences of Peter and other faithful people in the 1st century are more applicable to our situation today than the experiences we gained in the middle of the 20th century or even at the time of Luther.

Elsewhere in this issue of the Voice of Faith is an article by a prominent Lutheran journalist. Uwe Simon-Netto claims that we, the followers of Jesus, should refrain from using scripture to justify our positions on public policies. "The Bible is not a political playbook," he wrote. He goes back to the 16th-century writing of Martin Luther and his fellow reformers to explain their two-realm position very clearly: on the right hand is Christ's spiritual kingdom, and on the left hand is the political realm. God rules in the political realm by the agency of good and bad princes, Luther wrote, in arguing that church and state should be kept separate. In Luther's age, the Roman church claimed authority over all kinds of things, such as the honesty of scales

in shops, which we rely on the government to regulate. Here in Connecticut the Congregational Church was the established state religion until 1818, so separation between church and government is relatively recent in our history. The neat-and-clean separation that we see in the US Bill of Rights and learn in civics class is an ideal to strive for, not a reality. Many of the original thirteen states, including Connecticut, were founded as theocracies. At the same, in the ideal US system of government, we ourselves are the good and bad princes, so we are called to vote and govern according to our consciences.

Our consciences are formed, at least in part, by our life together under the Living Word of God. Simon-Netto is right when he says it's dangerous for us to claim scripture as our justification when we make political decisions. He is right: it is easy to misuse the Bible. Finding a Bible passage – a proof-text – to justify any particular political position is not very difficult. Once we've found the right passage, thumping the Bible and claiming to know God's will is very easy indeed. But, we do better as faithful followers of Jesus when we approach the Word with great humility and prayer. Abraham Lincoln said that we must always hope and pray that we're on God's side, rather than claiming that God is on our side in the political disagreements in our lives.

So, too Peter urged his fellow disciples of Jesus to walk in reverent fear of God, and in the 21st century that is what we are called to do. In the weeks to come, our Congregation Council will be pondering and praying about a new mission statement for our church. I pray we can use the New Testament examples of first-century churches as well as the words of the ancient prophets to discern how we can together embody Jesus in this (twenty)-first century world.

Yours in companionship on the path of life,
Pastor Ollie

May 2008

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 5:45 Evangelism 7:30 Special Ascension service @ Concordia, Manchester 7:00 AA/Parish Hall	2 1PM OA/Rm. 1	3 11AM Memorial Service for Bill Schiemer WELCA Spring Gathering
4 8AM Worship Svc. 8:45 Cherubs 8:45 Ringers/Singers 9AM Adult Forum 9:15 SCS 10:30 Worship Svc.	5	6 8:30 OA/Rm.1	7 10AM OA/Rm.1 7:30 Choir	8 Men and Women In Blue Day	9 1PM OA/Rm. 1	10 2PM AA/Parish Hall NE Synod Greater Hartford Mission Assembly 10-3, Emmanuel, Hartford
11 8AM Worship Svc. 8:45 Cherubs 8:45 Ringers/Singers 9AM Adult Forum 9:15 SCS 10:30 Worship Svc.	12 7:00 Church Council	13 8:30 OA/Rm.1	14 10AM OA/Rm.1 7:30 Choir	15 7:00 AA/Parish Hall	16 1PM OA/Rm. 1	17 YOUTH Tag Sale and Car Wash
18 8AM Worship Svc. 8:45 Cherubs 8:45 Ringers/Singers 9AM Adult Forum 9:15 SCS 10:30 Worship Svc.	19 7:00 WELCA @ J. Johnkoski's	20 8:30 OA/Rm.1	21 10AM OA/Rm.1 7:30 Choir	22 7:00 AA/Parish Hall	23 1PM OA/Rm. 1	24 1:00 AA/Parish Hall
25 8AM Worship Svc. 8:45 Cherubs 8:45 Ringers/Singers 9AM Adult Forum 9:15 SCS 10:30 Worship Svc.	26	27 8:30 OA/Rm.1	28 10AM OA/Rm.1 7:30 Choir	29 7:00 AA/Parish Hall	30 1PM OA/Rm. 1	31 1:00 AA/Parish Hall



May

04	Jeffrey Warren	14	Kimberly Parkany
06	Pat Sack		Matthew Scoles
08	Elaine Jaworski	23	John Doyle
	Beth Warren	24	Hans DePold
09	Paul Edinger	25	Kyle DePold
10	Taylor Lynn Kenyon	29	Sandy Chu
	Fred Schoenfeld	30	Luke Edinger
12	Stephen Jaworski		

The Faith Cares Committee continues to help and pray for the following members and friends of our congregation: Clinton Chu Eleanor Warren Frank Sauerbeck Karen O'Brien Elsie Benjamin Ed Larson Lucille Brooks Albert Fillmore Terry Scavetta Rachel Kayza Dorothy Fillmore Ivy Farinella Betty Exley Carole Bardons and Esther Argenyi.

For prayer concerns, transportation, or meal support, please call Pat Sack (860-644-9575) or Beth Godwin (860-649-1073), or sign up on the posters provided on the Narthex doors.

Upcoming activities at Faith

4/30 – Wed- Senior Lunch @12:00 PM
Parish Hall, Faith
5/1 – Thur – Special Ascension Service @
Concordia, Manchester @ 7:30
5/3 – Sat – Memorial Service for Bill
Schiemer @ Faith @ 11AM
5/3 – Sat – WELCA Spring Gathering @ Christ
the King, Windsor
5/8 – Thur – Men and Women in Blue Day
5/10 – Sat – NE Synod Greater Htfd Mission
Assembly @ Emmanuel Hartford 10-3
5/11 – Sun – Pentecost and Mother's Day
5/12 – Mon – Council Meeting @ 7PM
5/17 – Sat – Youth Tag Sale & Car Wash
5/19 – Mon – WELCA Meeting @ Janina
Johnkoski's @ 7

6/15 – Sun – 9:30 Service begins @ Faith
6/16 – Mon – WELCA Picnic @ Linda
Parkany's @ 6
7/11-13 – Fri-Sun – WELCA Retreat @
Koinonia, Londonderry, VT
7/26 – Sat – Thrivent Builds, Faith work day
@ jobsite in Hartford
8/24 – Sun – Faith & Family Day @ NB Rock
Cats with Thrivent
10/8 – Wed – Hartford Conference Clergy
Lunch @ Faith
12/7 – Sun – Merrimack Valley Ringers Bell
Concert @ Faith

YOUTH Happenings & Upcoming Events

April was again a busy month for the Youth of Faith and FABENEZER.

Hopefully you were able to join us for one of our Youth Services at Faith on 3/30 or at Ebenezer on 4/6 as both illustrated the positive impact God can have on young people's lives and their ability to share their faith with everyone around them. Eric and Morgan delivered great messages from the pulpit and the work the group had done on the music under Beth's guidance really showed through. A Special Thanks to Beth for all her help and all the other parents that helped with the transportation between the churches.

On the 13th we helped the Worship & Music Committee with the Manchester High Choral Concert. They were great and it was a pleasure to talk with such a nice group of students. Hope to see them back some time in the future.

We attended another Christian Concert, this time in New York City. This one featured SKILLET and had a different tone than the Casting Crowns one on the 29th, more of a hard rock sound but an equally great experience (Missed you Joe). For some it was their 1st time to New York City, on a train, on the New York Subway or all 3. We made it safely back to the church at 3am Sunday, talked about the concert experience, took a "nap" and then helped boost the attendance at our restarted 8am Service - a great way to wrap up the weekend! Watch the Youth Picture Board for pictures.

We also received our 1st letter from Zuleyma Jasmin, the child in El Salvador FABENEZER is sponsoring. It was great to get some more specifics on her situation and we're in the process of sending her our first letters. See the large poster board in the Parish Hall for more details.

We've also been busy as a group making the final preparations for the 30 Hour Famine. We're working hard to get the details in place so we can reach our goal of raising \$5,000. Thank you for all your help and support!

Coming up in May

- Continue Preparing for the 30 Hour Famine
- Preparing Prayer Blankets for the Burdick Family (Kathy is Ebenezer's Youth Leader) on 4/30 as they prepare for Scott's deployment to IRAQ for a 2nd tour of duty.
- The Tag Sale & Car Wash on 5/17 - Please check your homes for anything you'd like to donate & bring your car buy for a "Special" washing experience

See you in June with the Highlights from the Famine and Tag Sale / Car Wash

Kent

Pastor Ollie-Emergency Contact information

Telephone: 860-966-5712 (cell)

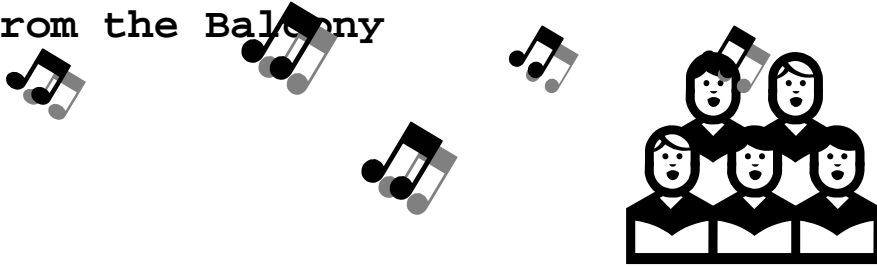
Email: Pastor.Ollie@gmail.com or olliejones@gmail.com

Keryl Robinson –Council President- emergency contact information

Telephone: 860-648-1867 (home); 860-995-7892 (cell)

Email: kyr1212@cox.net or keryl.robinson@symetra.com

Notes From the Balcony



Each spring, the beauty of the Earth surrounds us and reminds us of the powerful and unexplainable gifts our Creator provided —such as the sunshine, the rain and the wind. Have you noticed how growing things sway and bend in the wind, sometimes gently and at other times forcefully? At Pentecost, we often use the image of wind moving across the land to visualize the work of the Holy Spirit. We have all felt the wind. When it moves through trees or between corridors of buildings, we say we hear the wind. What we really hear are the vibrations created by that wind.

Have you ever visited the wind mover up in the balcony, our “pipe organ?” It is a remarkable musical instrument that traces its origin back many centuries. For those of you who are curious, come up to the balcony after church and I will gladly explain how Faith’s pipe organ produces sound, and how it differs from a piano or a keyboard.

It has been said that the organ was never invented—it evolved from the first hollow reed or whistle sounded by the breath of someone and then went through thousands of progressive stages to its present design. To produce the organ’s sound, air must be forced through pipes and blow across an opening. Different sizes and configurations and materials used for pipes affect the resulting sounds. Without the vibrations of air within each pipe, there would be no sound, no musical pitch.

As the organ evolved, craftsmen realized that the space (a church sanctuary) in which the organ is located also affected the resulting sound. As the moving air (the vibrations) filled the enclosed space, it rebounded from the walls and ceiling and surrounded those who stood with in it. Someone described this phenomenon to the activity within a violin. When movement outside the violin’s structure causes the strings to vibrate, the interior of wood instrument sings and resonates with sound. Can you imagine yourself standing within a resonating instrument? Each time you attend a worship service enhanced by music from a pipe organ, you experience those vibrations filling the space, stirring the air. I often marvel at how appropriate a pipe organ is in the worship service. Our Creator gave us the power of the wind and the ability to use it in many ways. What kind of vibrations has the Holy Spirit sent to you? What are you doing with them?

Susan Lionberger

Congregational Meeting

Please note that there will be a congregational meeting on Sunday, June 8, immediately following the 10:30AM worship service. Watch for bulletin announcements as to the agenda for the meeting.

At Your Service May:

8:00 a.m.

10:30 a.m.

05/04/08:

Greeters: Elaine Horowitz & Diana McVicker
Ushers: Ken Parkany & Linda Parkany
Lector: Martha McKerley
Comm Asst: Cathy Kay & Kent Tedford
Tellers: Craig Bolt & Keryl Robinson

Norm Banta & Cindy Banta
Tom Benoit & Kendra Dubiel
Don Francis
Joyce Lamontagne & Annette Bolt

05/11/08:

Greeters: Ed Carlson & Cathy Kay
Ushers: Carla Stolzenhaller & Jay Stolzenhaller
Lector: Joe Carlson
Comm Asst: Ken Parkany & Linda Parkany
Tellers: Kent Tedford & Pete Carlson

Beth Warren & Mike Myette
Bob Neumeister & Cathy Neumeister
Doris Schoenfeld
Donna Hubbs & Kurt Christensen

05/18/08:

Greeters: Ed Carlson & Diana McVicker
Ushers: Gene Johnkoski & Robbie Johnkoski
Lector: Janina Johnkoski
Comm Asst: Keryl Robinson & Cathy Kay
Tellers: Jay Stolzenhaller & John Holowczak

Jill Geyer & Barbara Lewis
Linda Woodrow & David Woodrow
Chuck Sack
Bruce Weston & Pete Carlson

05/25/08:

Greeters: Ed Carlson & Tom Benoit
Ushers: Elaine Horowitz & Martha McKerley
Lector: Tom Benoit
Comm Asst: Ken Parkany & Linda Parkany
Tellers: Chuck Sack & Steve Jaworski

Karin Boles & Eric Nelsen
Donna Hubbs & Dennis Hubbs
Pat Sack
Annette Bolt & Craig Bolt

PHOTOS

I am looking for recent photos of the people of Faith, for the church web site, the new brochure, and the new directory. Plus, I truly enjoy looking at them. Any that you have, please let me borrow them. I'll take them in any form: prints, email, CD. I will return them after I've made copies. Thanks! Pastor
Ollie Pastor@FaithLutheranCT.org.

P.S. If you prefer not to have pictures of you or your family members shown on the church web site or brochure, please tell me (no questions asked) and I won't use them for that purpose.

Social Ministry:

Men & Women In Blue will be held on Thursday, May 8 this year. Anyone who would like to help in any way is invited to do so. A sign up sheet is in the Narthex, or see Donna Hubbs. Our next and final meeting is on Thursday, May 1 at 7pm. All are invited. We will be setting up on Wednesday, May 7 from 5pm to 9pm.

As a special event this year, we will be presenting the East Hartford Fire Chief, Michael Eremita, with a prayer blanket to honor his retirement in late May from the East Hartford Fire Department.

Covenant to Care, the non-profit that runs our Adopt A Social Worker Program is in the process of finding us another social worker to adopt. Tawanda Hurdle-Jackson has decided to leave DCF and open a daycare center in her home. We will keep you posted.

The Mother's Day Appeal for the programs of East Hartford Interfaith Ministries will once again be celebrated on Mother's Day with a collection plate in the Narthex. We will also put it out on Sunday, May 3rd in case you want the certificate ahead of time to give to the honoree. You can celebrate your Mother and / or another significant woman in your life with a donation to the EHIM Human Needs, Friendship Center, or New Beginnings programs. If you would like to donate and receive an acknowledgement of your gift before that so you can give it to the Honoree on her day, please see Donna Hubbs and we will arrange to do that for you. We will also have general certificates available on Mother's Day for those last minute donators who wish acknowledgement.

When we are about God's business, amazing things happen! We are constantly reminded how actively God works in our hearts and actions to help those in need. For those of you who have stepped up to help, you have seen His hand in the work you do. For those who haven't experienced this yet, we invite you to come along anytime. You will be glad you did. Just let us know you are interested in doing so as your schedule permits and we'll be sure to put you on our "call" list!

Donna Hubbs, Committee Chair
Tom Benoit, Council Liaison

WELCA RETREAT - JULY 11-13 Blue Gentian Lodge Magic Mountain Road Londonderry, VT

JOIN US FOR AN INSPIRING, FUN FILLED RETREAT LED BY SUE ALLAIRE
FREE TIME ON SATURDAY AFTERNOON TO ENJOY THE POOL,
THE MOUNTAINS OR A WESTON PLAYHOUSE MATINEE

COST: \$120 (two nights lodging, taxes, two breakfasts, & dinner on Sat)

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: JUNE 22

CHECKS PAYABLE TO: KOINONIA OF VERMONT

Please give your retreat checks to Marjorie Coons along with your roommate preferences. The 3:00PM matinee at the Weston Playhouse is "The Light in the Piazza" which is a romantic musical that takes place in Florence, Italy. The cost of the show is \$46/ticket for an orchestra seat. Those checks should be payable to Annette Bolt directly.

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

Our year is very quickly drawing to a close. I would like to thank all of our Sunday School Teachers; Kendra Dubiel, Sarah Jaworski, Brian Godwin, Ron Hart, and Keryl Robinson. Thanks to their dedication and love for the youth, our children had a wonderful religious education experience. I would also extend my appreciation to Pat Sack and Susan Lionberger for sharing their musical talents with the Cherub Choir and our Youth Ringers. Also, thanks to Tammy, Martha and Jim. While hanging around, you were always willing to lend a hand. In addition, I would like to thank Doris Schoenfeld for her patience with me and keeping our finances on target.

Most importantly, I would like to thank all the children that attended Sunday School. As Pastor has said, "It is your church we are just keeping it for you". Remember you are all very special gifts from God and have been a blessing to your teachers and me. I look forward to seeing you all in September.

Some important dates are coming up:

June 1st - Sunday School students will assist with at the 10:30 service

June 8th - Will be our last Sunday School Class. We will keep our tradition for the last class will be activities outside.

We will resume classes in September. Look for all sorts of new and exciting programs.

God Bless,

Janina R. Johnkoski
Sunday School Superintendent

CDs of Youth Sunday and Pastor Ollie's Installation

CD recordings of the March 30th Youth Sunday Service and the Installation Service for our new Pastor, Ollie Jones, are available in the church office. Our youth and the youth from Ebenezer Lutheran in Willimantic offered their talents to the Lord and gave us a truly inspiring Worship Service. Ron Hart served as worship leader and Eric Bolt gave the sermon. Two CDs of the youth service are available in the church office. Please feel free to check one of them out and listen to an amazingly talented group of young people.

A CD of the March 30th Installation Service for Pastor Ollie is also available. If you were unable to attend the 3:00 pm Installation Service for Pastor Jones, or simply want to re-live the moment, please feel free to check out the CD and listen to this historic event in the life of our church.

Merlin Christianson

Arline Maynard

I had sent this note to some friends and family, to let them know about our Grandma Maynard. Some of you met her here at Faith, but it's been a few years since she's been able to come to church, so, I wanted to share this with our extended family at Faith also.

I realize you may think this is a bit odd, but I wanted to share this with my friends... it took me until (Thursday) morning at 4 am (the day after her memorial service on 3/26) when my cold medicine wore off (I am verrrrryyy slow sometimes) -- that she was my grandma, too, and maybe that's why we did so much stuff with her from about 1995 (after her husband died) until we moved in Dec. 2004. My last surviving grandparent was my grandma who lived in Florida, so we only saw her twice in her last few years, so we had to take it out on our neighbor. At the service Wednesday, her grand daughter spoke last, and said the big thing for her was a selfish thing, that in Grandma's eyes, you are perfect, and she's just thrilled to see you. That's how it always was with her, and my grandma too... I guess everyone's grandma. If you burned her house down by accident, she would apologize for it being so flammable. Anyway, it was a real nice service.. A little hard on Megan, as she assisted Pastor with one of the readings, so she walked in and out with him, and near the casket. The boys and I walked in and out with the casket too. That was harder than I thought it would be, even though we just walked alongside. At 93, with diabetes, Parkinson's, And Alzheimer's, it is a blessing she went so peacefully. Beth and another of our old neighbors corrected me... I had said that she saw our kids a couple of times a week, but they said it was more like a couple times a day. Aren't grandmas great? If you have any still, go give them a hug!! If not, adopt one at church!!

=====

This is from her memorial service:

Beth and I moved into our first house at 36 Dover Rd, in June, 1992, when Megan was 1 month old – just about little Ryan's age. {her great-grandson} It was a nice little cape, by far the nicest one we could find in our price range. What we didn't realize, was that it came with a built in Grandma and Grandpa next door. Diane was the selling agent on our house, and if she had advertised that her parents lived next door, she probably could have sold that house for a lot more!

With both our parents living out of state, Beth's family was often jealous of mine since they lived in NC or Ohio or India, and only saw their grand kids a couple of times each year, as opposed to my parents in NJ who we would see them much more often, since they are only 2 ½ hours away. What they didn't realize, is that they should have been jealous of Mrs. Maynard, who saw the kids several times a week, let alone a year! Once they discovered TV, and realized that Mrs. Maynard got a lot more channels than we did at our house, they would visit even more. It especially helped that she didn't mind watching cartoons whenever they stopped by, and I'm sure always had cookies on hand, and even milk and tuna fish

for our cat, Mu, so everyone was happy! I was talking to Wayne {her nephew} last night, and he was telling me how surprised he was when he'd be visiting, hear a knock on the door, and these 2 little boys would come over, make themselves at home, and turn her tv on!

I asked Peter what he remembered about Mrs. Maynard, and he said, going to her house on Friday nights, and having pizza and watching AFV (that's America's Funniest Videos – which is the #1 laugh festival on tv for kids)... we would laugh and laugh and laugh. She was a lot of fun, that impish little smile of hers, she was so cute. The only thing we ever argued about was that she'd always try to give me money for raking her leaves, or cutting grass, or shoveling snow. But, I'd tell her that it was their snow blower, or their lawn mower, etc. So, we'd compromise, and I'd tell her to save it and we'll go out for dinner. So, we went out a Lot. Friendly's ... Vic's... Home Town Buffet... Faith Pot Lucks, Hilda extravaganzas ... but I think one of her favorite's was Chuck E. Cheese... she loved to watch the all the kids running around, having a great time.

She would go to all kinds of stuff with us... soccer, baseball, basketball games, the pool, tons of concerts, fireworks, and yes, church too. I really don't remember when she started coming to Faith with us. Maybe it was Lenten Pot Lucks, but with her personality, she fit right in, and had a lot of fun, going to Senior lunches, super bowl parties, UConn games at Bruce's, etc, etc. One day she surprised us and told us that Pastor Henry baptized her after church one Sunday. She couldn't remember if her parents had her baptized as a child, so she figured she should get baptized. I think she used to hesitate in coming up for communion since the bulletin used to say something like "all baptized Christians are welcome to take communion", and she just wasn't sure.

Well, one thing I am sure of, is that we were blessed living next door to her for over 10 years. I know Ken and Linda always say that there is no such thing as a coincidence; it must have been part of God's plan for us.

I guess I had been thinking of her since her 93rd birthday was Feb 12th, and when Beth told me that Pastor was looking for people to do readings and a short devotion for our Good Friday service, for some reason, John 19:25-27 jumped out at me... That's the verse where from the cross Jesus sees his mother with the disciple that he loved, and tells him, "behold your mother", and turns to his mother and says, "behold your son", and from that moment on, John took Mary into his home.

All I could think of was that Jesus must have been telling us that, here is your Grandmother – she lives right next door. So that is the story I shared at our Good Friday service, shortly before she was called home. I don't know why... to quote someone famous, "it's a mystery". But, it's no mystery that we loved her, and that she loved this church, and is now with her Father in heaven. Brian Godwin

Mission Area Assembly
Saturday, May 10, 2008
10AM-3PM

The New England Synod is offering us all a mission plan. This is a 21st-century mission plan in which we reach out to our neighbors right here in New England to invite them to join us on Jesus's path of life. Under the "Called to Listen, Called to Live" banner, Bishop Margaret Payne has asked us all to work together around the New England Synod on this mission.

Coming up May 10th there's a Mission Area Assembly where we will gather with other Lutheran churches in the area to work together to imagine how we can work together on this right here in the greater Hartford area. Bishop Payne will be present to facilitate and listen. If you have ever been to an event with her, you know she's very good at facilitating faithful discussion. We're all invited to bring our passion for the future of the Lutheran Church and the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The assembly is open to everyone and will be at Emanuel Lutheran Church, 311 Capital Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106, (860) 525-0894. The organizers are providing lunch. Please let Kathy know by emailing or phoning the office if you can be there.

Christians should keep Scripture out of politics
By Uwe Siemon-Netto

From the April 18, 2008 edition of the Christian Science Monitor, adapted from a longer version originally published by Christianity Today. The author, a former religion editor for United Press International, is director of the Center for Lutheran Theology and Public Life in St. Louis.

What is Christianity's proper role in American presidential politics? This question has gripped the 2008 campaign. From the dispute over the acceptability of Mitt Romney's Mormonism, to Mike Huckabee's musings about conforming the US Constitution more to the Bible and the controversy over Sen. Barack Obama's former pastor, the spiritual and secular realms have collided fiercely. Just this week, Senator Obama and Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton fielded questions from US religious leaders at a special forum broadcast on CNN.

More broadly, arguments over public policies – from war to illegal immigration – are increasingly being infused with scriptural justifications.

The media, of course, relish such controversy. So do many religious leaders, who use the occasion to offer the "real" interpretation of what Scripture says about a particular issue. As a result, religion and politics aren't just mingling – they're being wedded to the same goal: redeeming America's body politic.

A largely Protestant nation that can trace its theological taproot to Martin Luther ought to know better. As the original Reformer, Luther understood how critical it was to separate church and state and, in a more important sense, the spiritual kingdom of Christ and the secular realm where God reigns in a hidden way through humans using reason as a guide.

That is not to say that Christians today shouldn't let their Christianity inform their political values and action. They should. But the Bible is not a political playbook. Christians, or adherents of any religion for that matter, should refrain from using holy text to fight politically over human concerns. Using Christian doctrine to push a political agenda is not just rude – it is a dangerous departure from the core message of Christianity: salvation by grace through faith.

Christ Jesus was not crucified to make society nicer or fairer; no, he suffered to redeem the believer from sin.

Did not Christ tell Pontius Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36)? Which of these seven words is so hard to understand?

Yet the clarity of Christ's statement hasn't stopped mankind from trying to bring heaven to earth ever since – mostly through political tyrannies of the collectivist utopian variety.

Luther understood these temptations. "The devil never stops cooking and brewing these two kingdoms together," he wrote, referring to the spiritual and the secular realms. With these words in mind, Lutherans – or at least Lutherans strongly committed to the confessional writings of their church – shake their heads over the misuse of Scripture in American politics on both sides of the political divide.

How, then, should Christians engage in political affairs? Through the language of reason in the framework of natural law.

Citing Paul, Luther reminded Christians that natural law is "written with the finger of God" on people's hearts, a fact to which their conscience "bears witness." Thus, Christians who want to publicly oppose the practice of abortion and same-sex marriage do not need to quote the Bible to do so. Instead, they can appeal to logic and universal principles that exist, not by man's decree, but by, as the Declaration of Independence puts it, "the Laws of Nature and Nature's God."

Sadly, natural-law thinking became unfashionable in the two centuries after Jean Jacques Rousseau. This philosopher behind the French Revolution extolled instead man-made "positive law," which was detached from the universal ethic usually attributed to divine authorship.

In this context it is worth noting how the 20th-century Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer judged the French Revolution, whose utopian dream was the liberation of man from all constraint. To the martyred Bonhoeffer, this Revolution was "the laying bare of the emancipated man in his tremendous power and most horrible perversity," a false liberation that leads only to man's self-destruction. He saw both Communism and Nazism as the French Revolution's heirs.

Natural law is the "operating system" in what Luther called the "left-hand kingdom," where God reigns in a hidden way "through good and bad princes," who in a democracy include the voters. In this secular realm, "reason is the empress," Luther said, describing reason as a gift from God that enables humanity to manage this temporal world.

Bonhoeffer considered the inability to distinguish between the spiritual and earthly kingdoms a major flaw of American theologies that manifest themselves as organized struggles against some particular worldly evil. "It is necessary to free oneself from the way of thinking, which sets out from human problems and which asks for solutions on this basis. Such thinking is unbiblical," he asserted. "The way of all Christian thinking leads not from the world to God but from God to the world."

Luther proclaimed a liberating message "that society need not be run by the Church in order to be ruled by God," according to the late William Lazareth, a former Lutheran bishop of New York. Yet too many Protestants have a hard time grasping the breathtaking implication of this insight.

To be sure, it would be desirable if more people turned to the Bible more often for everyday guidance. But the Gospel has nothing to say about traffic rules, illegal immigration, the price of gasoline, or the Iraq war.

The Gospel – the good news of salvation through Christ – is the Christians' highest good. Thus it is difficult to fathom why so many of them insist on exposing this magnificent treasure to public derision by using it for the wrong purpose. The Gospel can illumine the believer's reason in his secular pursuits but is not meant to be a script for them.

Half a millennium after Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg, it makes sense to ponder his down-to-earth comment that in politics, as in all other aspects of secular life, Christians must act reasonably according to natural law. The Gospel has freed them to do just that; it must not be perverted into a weapon to be slapped around other people's heads.