

PRESIDENT'S COMMENTARY MINISTRY UPDATE WINTER 2026

At a recent Pastoral Conference, we were talking about some important and challenging issues. An experienced brother Pastor spoke up... insightfully and profoundly. He captured our attention and our hearts. His words were simple "In spite of all our challenges, remember the beauty of the Church." It is easy to forget, isn't it? – especially since most of us have seen the ugliness that sin causes all around and also in the church. We confess we have been part of that ugliness because of our sinful nature, right? Sinners, repent!

The longer I serve as a Pastor and the older I get, these words bring back some beauty for me: "God be praised, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is: holy believers and 'the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd.' This is why children pray in this way, 'I believe in the one holy Christian church'... Its holiness exists in the Word of God and true faith." (Lutheran Confessions, Smalcald Articles) True faith is in our Savior whose blood covers our sins, takes our shame, and declares us fully forgiven and right with God. That is Amazing Grace!

Beauty, like this...

We were preparing to distribute the Lord's Supper, and was chatting with the Elder serving with me. It was an Anniversary service for the congregation. I asked if he grew up in the congregation. "No, I was baptized by Pastor T. about 25 years ago." Later, he found me and told me, "It was an answer to prayer. I was sitting on my front porch praying that God would send me a churchgoing wife. He did, and here I am." Wow!

I walked into a Sunday School room between services and the children and the teacher were gathered around God's Word. Together, they were learning and exploring, and the faith was being passed on to the next generation. Later, in that very same congregation, the back pews were filled with dads, moms, and children in worship. Precious!

150 years ago, the Lutherans were busy in northern Illinois planting churches. Now those congregations are giving thanks for what God has done, is doing, and will do through the life-giving Gospel given in Word and Sacrament. Watching people connect and reconnect with joy and anticipation is a memorable thing. So far, I have been at four 150th Anniversary services this year and dozens of other celebrations. All of these congregations have weathered storms, made sacrifices, and been given life by the Savior. Countless people are in the extraordinary nearer presence of Jesus in glory because of NID congregations' ministry!

Where have you seen the beauty that the Lord has given to your congregation recently? What have you been giving thanks for? Does your congregation celebrate the beautiful things that happen when the Lord is at work in Word and Sacrament? Jesus is still giving and creating Beauty!

Don't let sin or the power of the Devil convince you the church is ugly, because "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, to make her holy, cleansing her...to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." (Eph 5:25-27)

Let's remind each other that the Lord has made His Church Beautiful! In the Savior, "Show the Beauty, You forgiven people!"

Because the world is weary and because the Church gets weary,

Rev. Dr. Allan R. Buss

President

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