



THE SERVANT

The monthly newsletter of Servants of Christ
Lutheran Church, a congregation of The North
American Lutheran Church serving the
Cedar Rapids area

Meeting at Robins City Hall Community Room, 265 South Second
St., Robins, Iowa 52328
Worship: 9:00 am; Fellowship & Coffee: 10:00;
Bible Class and Sunday School: 10:15
Ronald Voss, Pastor cell: 563-206-4611; land: 563-682-7359

----- April 2023



The Empty Tomb



Dear Servant of Christ,

If you had to pick one symbol to represent Christianity, the vast majority would probably pick the Cross. It's in churches (all over); it's in cemeteries; it's on clothing; currently, it's found on face masks. And crosses of all shapes, sizes, and colors are used for jewelry, specifically necklaces. But the empty tomb, discovered by the women and disciples on Easter Sunday? Not so much. And I'd wager you have never seen a necklace with an empty tomb pendant. Even unbelievers recognize the cross, but if an empty tomb necklace was worn, people might lean closer, squint eyes, and finally even ask, "What is that?"

And yet, as much as the cross represents our salvation through Christ, the empty tomb proclaims as much, if not more, of that message. The joyous proclamation on Easter is "He is risen! He is risen indeed!" which means Jesus is alive . . . which means the tomb is empty!

Many Christians believe, or have even been taught, that the stone was rolled away so Jesus could "get out." If you really think about that, you have to laugh. The Creator of the world (along with the Father and Spirit), the Son of God, the Alpha and Omega, needs *help* getting out of a confined space??????? In reality, the stone was rolled away not so Jesus could get out but that we, His followers, could be invited in.



The empty tomb invites us in so we have visual proof that Jesus is not there. The women went early to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus, found the stone rolled away, heard Jesus was alive, and ran back to tell the disciples. Luke 24:11 reports the reaction of the disciples: "They did not believe the women." So Peter and John took off, running towards the tomb to "see for themselves."
(next page)

John 20:3-10 shares that John got there first but came to a screeching halt and only peered in. Impetuous Peter ran right in, stopped and stared bug-eyed at the grave cloths . . . the empty grave cloths. The "visual proof" was in many ways no visual but rather a tomb minus a body. The empty tomb was a precursor to the next 40 days as Jesus would appear to the disciples in the Upper Room: visual proof. He appeared a second time to help Thomas in his doubt, even showing Thomas the nail wounds on His body. Visual proof. Jesus built a fire on the lakeshore and cooked fish for his disciples as they unloaded their boat . . . visual proof. He had dinner with two followers from Emmaus . . . visual proof. St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that over the 40 days Jesus appeared to over 500 (yep, 500). Empty Tomb: Visual Proof.



The empty tomb invites us in to remember the promises of Jesus.

Mark 9:31 records, "For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, 'The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day.'" The same promise is recorded in Luke 24:7. You have heard the phrase "in one ear and out the other?" That seemed to happen a lot to the disciples. But the empty tomb provided a "flash backwards" of things Jesus had said and promised. There is not enough space to list all of Jesus' promises, and that's okay. Because the empty tomb doesn't require a perfect memory, just a big smile of gratitude.



The empty tomb invites us to anchor our hope. Again from St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 15:57: Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Or how about those words of assurance from John

14? "My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." Pull out the LBW and read again the verses of hymn 294, "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less." That hope leads back to that empty tomb.

If you find a lapel pin or necklace displaying an empty tomb, let me know. But remember, the important thing is you wear the empty tomb in your heart and live in its proof, promises, and hope every day of your life. "He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!" Thanks be to God.

Sharing the hope with you,
Ron



Holy Week at Servants of Christ

- ♦ Maundy Thursday, April 6, 5:00—Celebration of Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper
- ♦ Good Friday, April 7, 5:00—Focus on the seven last words of Jesus as He hung on the cross.
- ♦ Easter, the Resurrection of our Lord, April 9:00—Bring lilies/spring flowers to adorn the altar



Our Sunday morning Bible class continues studying Max Lucado's "The Great House of God," through the month of April. Join us each Sunday at 10:15 as we take a fresh look at the Lord's Prayer.

Quarterly Brunch, April 30, following worship



In our next fiscal year, Servants of Christ will be supporting a new congregation in North America. At this brunch, we will be selecting the congregation we wish to support.

Liturgy Change

Sunday, April 16, we will change our liturgy setting, using Setting 4 in *With One Voice* (the blue book). A new opportunity to enrich our worship life.



The **2023 Bi-Annual Convocation** of the NALC will be held in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, August 16-18. If you would like to attend and represent Servants of Christ, let Ron know.

CONNECTIONS
magazine

If you like a copy of this sent to your home, at no cost, please let Ron know.

A large, stylized yellow cross with radiating lines, symbolizing the Easter story.
**He is
RISEN**



Disaster Response KIT PACKING LIST

* REVISED NOVEMBER 2022

IMPORTANT — PLEASE READ FIRST

HOW TO PACK YOUR DISASTER KITS:

- Please send **COMPLETE** kits as outlined here. Incomplete kits must be completed before they can be distributed.
- Pack them, in **STURDY, WELL-TAPED** boxes (not too large).
- Label contents and quantity in **LARGE BLOCK LETTERS** and place labels on at least one end and one side of the box so the contents will be visible regardless of how box is stacked.
- Include the name and address of your group or congregation on each box with a label that says: "A GIFT FROM [name & address of your church or group]"

Financial donations designated for
NALC Disaster Response*
should be made payable and mailed to:
North American Lutheran Church
PO BOX 860565
Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565

*Indicate "NALC Disaster Response" on the memo line
of your check

For more information, please email Mary Bates,
disasterresponse@thenalc.org or visit
thenalc.org/nalc-disaster-response/

Bibles

- new or used (highlighted & underlined text is acceptable)
- child, teen or adult
- Bible stories for children
- Spanish, or any language
- large print
- prayer books

We encourage you to write
messages of hope in the front pages
of donated Bibles

Flood Buckets

- 1 five-gallon bucket with lid
- 1 jug bleach (1/2 gal. or smaller)
- 2 large trash bags (Contractor 3 mil)
- 1 roll paper towels
- 2 rags
- Comet or scouring cleanser
- Pine Sol or liquid cleaner
- scrub brush
- gloves, 1 pair each, size L preferred
 - rubber (reusable, i.e. Platex, dishwashing type)
 - leather
 - cotton

Health Care Kit

(Pack in 2-gallon plastic storage bag or tote bag)

- 1 bath towel
- 1 wash cloth (optional)
- 1 shampoo (2 if travel size)
- 1 bar of soap (2 if travel size)
- 1 toothbrush
- 1 pack of floss (optional)
- 1 toothpaste (2 if travel size)
- 1 comb
- 1 deodorant
- 1 nail clippers (optional)

School Kit — Elementary

- 1 backpack or duffel bag
- 4 notebooks
- 4 pocket folders
- 1 blunt scissors
- 1 ruler
- 1 pencil sharpener
- 4 pencils
- 2 pens
- 1 eraser
- 1 box of crayons, colored pencils, or markers

School Kit — High School

- 1 backpack or duffel bag
- 4 notebooks
- 4 pocket folders

OUR 2023
PRIMARY FOCUS
PURCHASE THESE
ITEMS DURING LE
WE WILL PACK
KITS AFTER
EASTER

Oh God, didn't give Friends of Madagascar much! Oh YES!

"2 water programs: (1) 2 Drip irrigation teaching centers & (2) drilling new wells & repaired damaged ones."

Water is an absolute necessity for life! So how do you live when you do not have water (or clean water) to drink or to grow your crops? Millions of Malagasy people live with a lack of adequate water, most in the south west part of Madagascar where we support most of our programs. We realize that FOMM can not



A lush field irrigated through drip irrigation

solve this mega problem which can only

be solved by governments and big corporations. But we believe we can show in our small ways that there are solutions to this issue. So, we are providing water projects: 1) A Drip Irrigation Teaching Center at two locations, Ejeda Hospital and Manasoa Bible School to teach people how they can raise crops even in times of drought. 2) We are working on two ways to provide water in cooperation with other agencies/non-profits to reduce the costs. A) We are working with Madagascar Water Project to reclaim wells that are not producing and in 2022 reclaimed **29 wells** at an average cost of **\$1,500.00**. Each well serves an average of 1,500 persons. B) Secondly, we are preparing to dig two deep wells that will produce large volumes of clean water. The cost averages **\$20,000.00** each. To date we have received funding for two wells. One is from a small, but vibrant mission focused congregation of 100 members who in 9 months raised support for one well, Vernes Lutheran Church, Fosston, Minnesota and the second well from an individual couple who wishes to remain anonymous.



Water reservoir towers providing water for the drip irrigation field



A repaired well

To learn more about the water projects and how you may support this project, go to our web site at:

www.MadagascarMission.org and click on "Get Involved/Projects"

Oh God, didn't give Friends of Madagascar much! Oh YES!

"20,000 Bibles in the Tandroy Dialect printed and distributed."

Since Steve Lellelid completed the translation of the Bible into the Tandroy dialect in 2018. Since then, FOMM has printed 40,000 copies of this Bible, plus 70,000 hymnals in the same dialect. God's Word is being heard for the first time in this tribe's native language. So why not print the Bible in the official Malagasy language? Because the people speak their tribal dialect and thus do not hear the Word of God. Steve has made this possible with his work to translate the Bible into this dialect.

But there is more to the story. Not only did he translate the Bible but he and his wife have been teaching the people how to read and write the Tandroy dialect through a grant from the Adsum Foundation in Belfast, Ireland. They train many to teach others and the success is instrumental in getting God's Word read and understood. A dozen years ago it was hard to find a single person in most villages who could read and now it's hard to find a village that does not have those who can read and write.

The cost to print 20,000 Bibles in Kerela, India through the Ebenezer Press (A Christian printing company), ship them to Madagascar and pay the import duties and handling amounts to about \$85,000.00. Gifts of any size are now welcome for the third printing of the Tandroy Bible.

To learn more about the Tandroy Bible Printing Program and how you may support this project, go to our web site at: www.MadagascarMission.org and click on "Get Involved/Projects"



The Bibles have been distributed by vehicle, ox carts and her is pictured an 85-year-old man by the name of Rehaba who delivers the Bibles with is fat wheel bicycle.

Oh God, didn't give Friends of Madagascar much! Oh YES!

"25 Prison Ministries sharing the Gospel of forgiveness and hope."

The prison ministry began in 2010 with 3 prisons. At the end of 2022 we were supporting 25 prison ministries. The goal is to begin 5 additional prisons in 2023, for a total of 30 prison ministries. There is a total of 82 prisons in Madagascar, and with your support we will have a ministry in each prison.

Each prison ministry is based out of a local congregation. The pastor and members are trained and supervised for the ministry. They visit the prison at least once each week to lead a worship service, provide Bible Study, confirmation, counseling, assist with food/clothing/medicine and when a prisoner is released from prison, they assist with travel expenses to return home.

2022 Prison Ministry Statistics

Number of worship services: 1,160

Number of congregation members who helped with the prison ministry: 6,991

Number of prisoners who attended worship services: 173,893

Number of prisoners confirmed: 192

Number of baptisms: 50

Number of rice bags given: 2,028

FINANCIAL INFORMATION: The cost for the prison ministry in 2022 was \$80,000.00. In 2023 we are increasing the funding to \$86,000.00 in order to begin 5 new prison ministries.



A team being trained to lead the ministry at a prison.



A worship service, singing group



A worship service in a prison

In addition, in 2023, we are beginning to support the Antalaha Children's Prison Ministry. Children in this region are caught stealing vanilla beans, which currently have great value. The children are hired for "pennies" to steal the beans. But they are often caught and in Madagascar they go directly to the prisons because the "French legal system" claims guilty until proven innocent. It then takes months and even years to have their day before a judge. We will also be providing legal help to these children. To learn

more about the Prison Ministry and Antalaha Children's Ministry programs and how you may support these projects, go to our web site at: www.MadagascarMission.org and click on "Get Involved/Projects"

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Oh God, didn't give Friends of Madagascar much! Oh YES!

"400 girls attending Nofy i Androy program to receive an education."



A graduate from a program to work as a midwife.

Born into a culture that does not value education for girls, Nofy i Androy exists to help girls beginning at the 5th grade to stay in school and even continue their education at a university or trade school. The success rate for this program is very high and more girls are taking advantage of this educational program. FOMM has assigned a female evangelist from the Ambovombe Androy Synod to work within the program to teach the Christian Faith to the girls, counsel with the parents and girls to encourage them to stay in the program.

We have a program to sponsor a girl for \$200.00 a year, hopefully renewed until the girl finishes her education. A donor will receive a photo and bio of the girl, plus two letters a year giving an update on the girl's educational goals.

To learn more about the Nofy i Androy Program and how you may support this project, go to our web site at: www.MadagascarMission.org and click on "Get Involved/Projects"

A Look Back: One Year Serving Ukrainians



A Look Back: One Year of Safe Water for Ukraine

February 24, 2022, is a day that changed the trajectory of millions of lives. When Russia invaded Ukraine, men, women, and children went from living a life of normalcy to a life of seeking refuge overnight. Families were torn apart. Communities were devastated. An entire country was shaken to its core. This ongoing crisis continues to impact millions of people, including the [5.4 million](#) who are internally displaced in Ukraine. Deadly missile strikes continue to damage municipal infrastructure, leaving people without reliable access to [safe water, sanitation, and hygiene \(WASH\)](#) resources.

With more than [20 years of experience in disaster response](#), Water Mission was well-positioned to quickly respond to this disaster. In the days following the invasion, our Disaster Assistance Response Team deployed to assess the situation and determine how to best respond to urgent needs with agility.

Partners like you have enabled us to produce more than 6 million gallons of safe water and serve Ukrainians by meeting a variety of needs. |



Abiding in Christ Vine and Branches

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by 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, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:1-5)

In our "hurry up" world of the 21st century, the word "abide" is seldom heard, and many people may not even know what it means. We live in a time of "instant" everything—food, information, transportation. Patience is rare. And one thing that is lost in this kind of mad race to get to the next moment, the next experience, the next relationship, is the ability to sit still. As people who know me well are likely thinking, I'm probably the last person to be talking about patience and sitting still. I saw a shirt not long ago that said, "I had my patience tested, and it was negative." This is all to say that I'm not immune to the mad rush to finish the current task or moment and get on to the next one. Perhaps this is why the word "abide" fascinates me. Abiding brings to mind soothing thoughts of being still, waiting with someone, being attached, calming down, relaxing into the moment, and giving myself permission to not take responsibility for all the things around me.

All this anxiety so many of us feel about the current moment seems to engulf us and bleeds into every area of life. There is a sense in which we are in charge of ourselves and our environment. Whether it is fixing something in the house, "finding" ourselves, or figuring out who God is and what He wants, we have a tendency to "do it ourselves". "How to" books are available for every area of life. And when we have a problem most people seem to jump in with a new program, solution, or technique, rarely stopping to sit still and bring it to the Lord—and wait patiently for His directions. I read once that a theologian was giving a talk to a group of high-tech folks, presumably Christian, who when asked if they would pray about a computer problem answered that Jesus lived 2,000 years ago and wouldn't know anything about computers....

Our culture is also one in which there is a sense of entitlement—a tendency to put ourselves first. Even though we celebrate the freedoms we have in the "new world"—freedom of speech, freedom of religion,

freedom to do many things that were forbidden in the 1600s in Europe and are probably still forbidden in many places—these freedoms have not always been lived out in the ways our forebears may have envisioned. The ideas of "me first", MY freedom to do or be whatever I want, and "if it feels good, do it", have become accepted values in our society. I was a teenager in the 1960s and the whole idea of "me first" was really strong then. In retrospect, however, some of the attitudes that were so shocking nearly 60 years ago are pretty mild compared to much of what we see and hear on social media now. When we consider all this in light of the teachings of Christ, we see a large gulf. Some folks understand these changes to mean that we're more enlightened now, and that the traditional Christian faith is out of date. However, if we read the Old Testament prophets, we find something quite different. As the Preacher said in Ecclesiastes 1, *"All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, 'See, this is new'? It has been already, in the ages before us."* (verses 8-10) If we read the Old Testament prophets, we also find a deep resonance with the current rebellion against God and His authority over us. While the technology is far more advanced now than in the past, the human heart has not changed. And all this emphasis on ourselves is rooted in human sin. Like the rats following the Pied Piper of Hamelin, we are mesmerized by the "magic flute" of a me-first culture that validates our desires and lures us away from the rock-solid teachings of the Lord God into danger and death.

In Psalm 46, the psalmist calls us back to the Lord in this way-- *"Be still, and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth!"* (verse 10) It is in stillness that we come to know God. It is in abiding in and with Christ that our hearts and minds can slow down and begin to listen to the still, small voice that comes from our Creator and Redeemer. What does it mean to be attached to the Vine of Christ? What does it mean to be still and to abide? What does it mean to trust that God is in control? In the coming months I propose to spend some time pondering these questions and seeking God's answers through the written and incarnate Word of God.

Pastor Barbara M. Wills