

Oregon Circuit Congregational Reports

Circuit Pastor, Thad Bitter

Grace Lutheran Church, Portland, OR – Pastor Thad Bitter

Ministry at Grace in Portland continues to be filled with blessing and challenges. In the past few years God has blessed us with the opportunity to make several improvements to the ministry facilities at our church and school. Most recently, the dedication of a new digital / hybrid organ and balcony renovation at Grace Church has been a tremendous blessing. Along with a very talented group of worship musicians and organists, worship at Grace continues to blend all the gifts of music together each Sunday. Attendance in worship in 2016 is thankfully up as in-reach and outreach efforts continue to be blessed and some wonderful WELS transfers have move to the Portland area. However, significant transfers out have proved challenging as God's people move to other parts of the country. Grace is currently creating a two year Stewardship plan and planning to participate in the Praise and Proclaim outreach in the next year. New approaches to weekly bible studies will also emphasize outreach and stewardship. Grace school continues to be a great blessing by providing opportunities to reach out with the Gospel and nurture many families in the Portland area. While enrollment is down and we face some significant financial challenges we remain thankful for all the blessings God gives us through our school. Next year, Grace School will open a new chapter in its history as staffing changes and realigning classrooms will allow Ryan Schlemming to transition into the role of full time Principal while Mark Leitzke will teach a 6th – 8th grade room. In the fall of 2016 Grace will begin offering before and after school care with the hope of expanding our ECE program to include fulltime childcare beginning the 2017-2018 school year. We continue to trust in God when there are challenges and thank him for his blessings!

Immanuel Lutheran Church: Salem OR – Pastor Craig Wasser

The Lord's blessings are numerous. We have welcomed 20 new souls into our walk with Jesus since January 1. This brings with it many new opportunities for growth and sharing the gospel. Our Elementary School continues to serve as a great blessing to our ministry as well. This past year we enrolled and served a record number of children. Our School is adding a playground this year after five years of raising funds. We raised \$29,000 for the entire project. We thank God for his grace. We continue to face the reality of revolving staff. Last year we did not replace the manpower of our former Principal after he took a call to Manitowoc Lutheran High School. This year we are not replacing the manpower of our Pre-school teacher or our Vicar. These changes place a heavy load on our current staff. We pray for God's Blessings. Our future planning consists of an all member stewardship emphasis. The key focus will be on financial giving. We do not have a line of credit and we are seeking to increase giving to a level where we can fund our \$500,000 budget without borrowing during months where we have lower income. We also will continue to explore reaching out to Albany Oregon with the gospel. Finally, our congregation is going through a self-analysis. We want to improve on many areas of our ministry, build on our strengths and better address our weaknesses as a congregation. May God continue to bless us.

Trinity Lutheran Church: Eugene, OR –Pastor, Ben Zuberbier

Trinity in Eugene underwent a transition in August 2015 when Pastor Jay Blum retired from 31 years of faithful service as pastor. Pastor Ben Zuberbier, a 2015 graduate, was ordained and installed as pastor on August 2nd. Please include him in your prayers as he serves God's people in the Eugene-Springfield area. Over the past year, Trinity has started an active youth group that meets quarterly to plan: 1) an activity--we've gone to trampoline parks, played laser tag, went bowling, etc. ; and 2) a service event--Spaghetti dinner, church clean-up etc. One of the congregational goals is to start an active campus ministry with the University of Oregon and Lane Community College. God-willing we will be able to establish one for the 2016-2017 school year.

Peace Lutheran Church, Vancouver, WA – Pastor Gary Kraklow

We tried to do some different and extra fellowship/evangelism items this year. We had a family outing to Oaks Amusement Park In Portland, a couple of family bowling Saturdays, a golf outing, an Oktoberfest, a theatre outing to see “Church Basement Ladies” with dinner to follow. Nothing happened that would appear in statistics, but we have had friends of our members come to church a few times and not be “afraid” of us. But the events were also a lot of fun for our members and they feel closer together after doing a number of things outside of “church.” We are presently working at upgrading our sound and video equipment and capabilities.

Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church: Corvallis, OR – Vacancy Pastor, Craig Wasser

Pastor Vanselow retired this past January. We are thankful for his 38 years of faithful ministry. As of this writing we have extended five calls. We are waiting to see if the Lord blesses our latest one. While we are waiting for the Lord to reveal who our next Pastor will be, we are giving the parsonage a big face-lift throughout its interior. The Lord has blessed us with a very solid attendance even after Pastor Vanselow's departure. Our offerings have also increased from the previous year. We are thankful that the Holy Spirit has enabled us to remain strong. Our biggest challenge is having only a few main leaders, the weight of ministry falls on us and we are not necessarily trained to handle all of it. Yet, the Lord's promise is clear. He never gives us more than we can handle, and he is always with us. We look forward to the day he blesses us with a full time shepherd. Currently, Ib Meyer is holding this call. Until then, we joyfully wait for God to reveal his will.

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church, Milwaukie, OR –Pastor Joseph Johnson

Amazing Grace is a congregation that Satan hates and fears! That’s because Amazing Grace is made up of Saints who are holy and true. They give themselves first to the Lord and then love others. Their offerings are gifts of love that come from pure hearts. Indeed they continually offer God sacrifices of praise that are pleasing to him. They are lights in the darkness and the praise of God’s glory. They are sealed with the Holy Spirit and look forward to their inheritance! They will judge the world! So that’s the reality of Amazing Grace Lutheran Church and something I need to remember.

Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Hillsboro, OR – Pastor Scott Mews

Your brothers and sisters in the faith at Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church continue to enjoy God's blessings as they gather around his Word and sacraments. They started meeting in a school gymnasium in Beaverton, OR in 1999. Nearly 20 years later their ministry center is in a professional complex in a growing area of Hillsboro, OR. God continues to bless them with a core group of very active leaders who are always ready to share the joy with more. They have an active focus on in home Bible Studies. Currently they have four such Bible studies throughout the week. Members as well as prospects attend. Two are now in Bible Information Class. Recently they celebrated two child baptisms! If you would like to help Beautiful Savior, please pray for more children to attend their Sunday School hour.

Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Tigard, OR – Pastor Dan Moll

This has been an interesting year for Gethsemane. As some of you know we had a significant number of members leave over the doctrine of objective justification. They decided to reject our doctrine and join ELDONA (Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America). They have started their own church in the area. This left Gethsemane in a serious financial situation. It was clear that if something didn’t change that we would have to close our doors by October of 2015. When this news became public several neighboring congregations and individual stepped up giving funds sufficient to grant several more months of operating expenses effectively providing funds through March of 2016. We were thankful for the blessings God provided and were handing out flyers and putting together a Christmas for Kids program when we received a call from the WELS Foundation. They informed us that they had a gift for us that was supposed to be distributed in 1996. With this gift, half of which came in cash and the other half which is locked up in an endowment, Gethsemane has been blessed with about five years to reach out to our community and do God’s work. We are astounded by the wisdom and power of God who answered our prayers in such a tangible way. Pray for us that we may use the time God has given us wisely, for his glory and the growth of the gospel in Tigard.