

Rainier (South Sound) Circuit

Circuit Pastor: David Birsching



Divine Peace – Renton

Pastor Joel Hoff

Greetings from Divine Peace!

Change is one word that describes what we have experienced in Renton this past year. The members of Divine Peace made the decision last summer to transition from using The Lutheran Hymnal to Christian Worship as their primary hymnbook. While we enjoy singing new songs to the Lord, we rejoice in knowing that the focus of our worship remains the same as we proclaim the old, old story of Jesus and His love.

An exciting new addition for our congregation are the Sudanese families who will transfer to Divine Peace this coming July. The Sudanese ministry has added a confirmation class and a leadership training program to our present ministries as well as the training of Simon Duoth in the PSI program. On Pentecost, we celebrated a special mission festival service which included a reading in the Nuer language and songs by the Sudanese choir. It is a tremendous blessing to be reminded that there are world mission fields in our own backyard.

The ladies of Divine Peace have restructured our ladies guild. They have organized several groups which focus on the areas of spiritual growth, service and care, and fellowship. These groups encourage the women to actively use their God given gifts in service to God and others. They will host a Ladies Tea this summer on Saturday, August 6.

The Cascade Neighborhood Association included a church directory in their annual events paper which gave us free advertisement to hundreds of households in our community. From this advertisement and our outreach programs, *Hitting the Streets* and *Building Bridges*, we hope to connect to our community even more in the year to come. God continues to answer our prayers as several visitors now regularly join us for worship and we have an opportunity to connect them to Christ.

In July, we will kick off our summer reading program. The program is designed to encourage parents to read with their children. Since there are sixteen elementary schools within a five mile radius of Divine Peace, we anticipate that this outreach effort will be a blessing for many young families. At the end of the program we will offer a one day family VBS camp.

Our congregation has experienced a number of changes this past year. I am thankful to share but a few of the many reasons we have to glorify our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday and today and forever.

In Christ whom we serve,

Pastor Joel A. Hoff

Faith – Tacoma

Pastor Jeremy Schulz

God continues to bless the family of believers at Faith Lutheran in Tacoma. With his grace, we continue to rejoice in and to share the Gospel of Jesus through our church, school and preschool ministries.

Our school continues to thrive and will *God-willing* serve over 100 children for the first time ever. With thankful hearts, we welcome a new teacher to our staff for the next school year: Mrs. Naomi Getka. Naomi will teach 5th Grade. Our other teachers are Principal Paul Leifer: Grades 6-8, Brian Humann: Grades 3-4, Jill Holter: Grades 1-2, Mary Kurbis: Kindergarten, and Amanda Humann: Preschool. We also have a few assistant teachers for the preschool and staff for our Extended Care. Nancy Leifer serves as our church and school office manager.

A challenge before the people of Faith: Our new teacher will be setting up her classroom in our church basement. We need more space to stretch Faith's ministry arms! We struggle with city code requirements of bearing the cost of redoing the surrounding city streets before we are able to build anything on our campus. Yet God has also provided another plot of land for us next to our school property. It is a separate parcel, and our prayer is that God will enable us to soon build a few new classrooms on this property. Please join us in prayer that God's will would be done!

We pray that God will continue to guide and bless the ministry that is done through the people of Faith in Jesus' name to our people and the surrounding community.

Pastor Jeremy Schulz

Holy Trinity – Des Moines

Pastor Thomas Voss

Change continues to be the name of the game at Holy Trinity. In November, Pastor Mark Schewe took a call to serve at St. Peter in Clovis, California. He and his family bid us farewell in early January. We have yet to call another full-time pastor, but have been relying on local help to preach and teach. Pastor Lambert will be serving a part-time vacancy in July-August, and we are looking into calling a semi-retired man for the fall. The long-term plan is to call another younger pastor to focus on outreach duties and connecting with the next generation of Holy Trinity.

Our school has continued to see many blessings. We are sad to see two long-time teachers leave us this summer. Carol Cole joins her husband Stan in retirement and they will soon leave to be near family in Wisconsin. In addition, Chris Poetter was granted a peaceful release from his call so that he and his wife, Ann, could return to Watertown to take care of family obligations. We give thanks for the many years of service and blessing that the Cole's and Poetter's gave to Holy Trinity, ELHS, and the PNW District.

Though change can be hard, it can also be a blessing. Pastor Schewe's departure has given us an opportunity to evaluate our ministry needs and plans. The departure of two teachers also allowed us to shift some teachers so that we might capitalize on gifts and opportunities.

As a result, Mrs. Alyssa Kelley will be shifting from Kindergarten to 3rd-4th grade while Mrs. Sheryl Birsching will be moving along with her Preschool-4 class into Kindergarten. We are also blessed to have two new workers joining us soon.

Mr. Geron Brown was called to serve as Athletic Director and departmentalized upper grades teacher. After moving to the area last summer, Geron had been praying for an opportunity to return to a Lutheran school after teaching in the public schools for the last few years. He previously taught at Christ Our Redeemer in Aurora, Colorado.

In May, we were beyond blessed to receive a qualified Early Childhood Director from MLC as Ms. Megan Ungemach was assigned to serve as ECE Director and Preschool 4 teacher.

Our school enrollment is projecting to top the 142 that we ended this year with, and we look forward to a preschool program that has far more enrollees at this point compared to last year. We are beyond thankful for the opportunity to feed the Word to Jesus' lambs each day as we build relationships with students and their families. May the Lord continue to bless all of our efforts!

Pastor Tom Voss

Korean Lutheran Church – Des Moines

Pastor Youn Park

Mission in Korea (and/or China)

- Training lay leader

For the past few years, I have been teaching Catechism and Bible Information Classes to lay leaders in Korea via the internet (Skype). So far, it is my feeling, that this teaching has not been accepted as vital. I expect, this is due to the time difference and other reasons. So I have prayed for ways to encourage the Korean lay leaders, even if it means to see them face-to-face, if possible. A trip to Korea is not an easy thing, so far. However, a few month ago, my wife and I visited Korea for about two weeks, as my mother-in-law is ill and it also allowed me to visit the lay leaders I have been teaching. I confirmed that

there are lay leaders who dream about being an evangelist, an elder, and /or a pastor in Korea.

Therefore, the Korean Lutheran Church has been planning to provide Bible training and to share the gospel through internet means for those lay leaders and their children living in Korea. With a view toward the future, eventually this program would be able to share the gospel to any Koreans in Korea and spread into China. This training started the first week of January 2016, after the trial for the test. The solution of 'clickmeeting' is live study to face to face, upload any study materials, recoding, and reviewing lessons when they need.

The ultimate objective of this project is establish WELS Church and school in Korea within 3 years and 1-2 more churches before I retire.

Mark 16:15 *"He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation"*

- **Virtual Online School**

K School of Virtual Online class for in Korea (China and everywhere)

KLC is running a 'Korean School'. This school is supported by the Korea Board of Education and is available for enrollment through the WA State Board of Education. The school is accredited by a regional accreditation agency (www.advanc-ed.org). So we plan to expand the school to Korea by using this local program here via the internet and/or an afterschool program for children of the CAP course trainer and lay members and around their neighbors' children who are in public school, but it is still pending due to lack of teachers. Further, we plan bilingual classes to their children and kids who hardly understand English and we will be using the advantages through the accredited program in Washington State. Mostly, the subjects would include: Bible studies, Catechism, writing, reading, and history, since the children learn other subjects in Korea's public schools.

I would be teaching Bible history and Catechism but would need certified teachers for other subjects, i.e., language arts, (writing, reading, spelling) history, etc. Also, K school has teachers and substitute teachers who can teach all subjects, except Bible/Catechism, in a bilingual format. Some of them are certified in Korea for a Korean teacher, and majored in education in college. They are serving in K school Korean classes. This program can begin as soon as we are ready and have the communication tools in place via our internet system.

The children who at any levels would want to study more in the US, would be transferred to Holy Trinity and one of the WELS schools. (For reference, I assisted over 70 children with enrollment and transferring to HTLS/ELHS and other WELS schools, so far.)

Through these classes the children will become Christ-centered in their faith by and through the true gospel. We believe that children should become great gospel

contributors to their community and to other souls in Korea. (*or China: about 3 autonomous provinces with Korean Chinese in NE China. So this class also has a plan to open to anybody who wants to learn the true gospel with the Virtual Online Class program who lives everywhere, as soon as we are ready in the future.)

Pastor Youn Park

Light of Life – Maple Valley/Covington

Pastor Daniel Lange

This past fall Light of Life applied for an Antioch II grant. The grant was not approved but the process gave the congregation and its leadership a chance to reflect on all the blessings, challenges, and opportunities before our church and preschool ministry in Covington.

Worship and preschool education continue to be areas of focus and blessing for our congregation.

Our congregation has been blessed with many talented musicians. We are currently investigating sanctuary improvements/expansion to add seating. We hope this will better accommodate visitors at our special services (e.g. preschool children sing) and membership as Sunday morning attendance increases.

Our preschool has been an ongoing blessing as an education/outreach arm of our church. This past year we tried granting a month of tuition reimbursement for families willing to take our BIC. We'll continue it again next year as it was met with success. We have 53 (56 capacity) enrolled for next year. Our waiting lists are growing for morning and pre-k sessions.

This brings us to one of our greater challenges. How can we serve more people on our waiting lists and reach more families in our community in our current facilities? We are forecasting this need to only grow as the construction of 5000 new homes in our ministry area has begun. Facility and septic improvements/additions was the focus of our grant application. The congregation is excited about the idea of expansion yet it is also balancing these plans with the other challenge/blessing of subsidy reduction (scheduled for 2 final years).

Pastor Daniel Lange

Messiah Lutheran – Lacey/Olympia

Pastor Joel Nitz

Here goes for Messiah Lutheran:

Challenges

Maintaining continuity in a mobile society

Keeping Lutherans faithful when Evangelical churches seem more attractive

Engaging the millennial generation

Uncovering a vision for gospel ministry and pursuing it

Blessings

Congregational Assistant Program advancing through a second year

Working through "Breakout Churches" to uncover a vision

Two millennial generation men on our board of elders

Stable, regular gospel ministry endures

We celebrate the 25th Anniversary of Messiah Lutheran on July 17, 10:30 am Worship Service

Pastor Joel Nitz

Saint Paul – Tacoma

Pastor David Birsching

Saint Paul's has a rich history here in the Pacific Northwest. We are not only the oldest WELS congregation in the Rainier Circuit, the Puget Sound area, or the state of Washington, but in the entire Pacific Northwest District. Our congregation began gathering in 1884 ... 132 years ago! God has been exceedingly gracious to us through the years, and he continues to shower his grace upon us.

God's goodness is evident in many recent improvements to our facilities. In the last several years He has enabled us to upgrade our sound system, and add projectors and screens to our Sanctuary. We also have a new church sign, as well as upgraded and regularly maintained landscaping. Plus the church basement renovation (now our "fellowship area") is essentially completed. Some of the blessings God has brought us through the project are a ground-level entryway into the basement from our parking lot (north side of the church), handicapped parking slots near the door, upgraded lighting, new carpeting, and a renovated kitchen. These improvements continue to be huge blessings to our ministry.

Another double blessing was that a life-long member of St. Paul's entered heaven recently. He is blessed with living in the presence of his Savior now and forevermore, and his congregation is blessed through a very generous bequest from his estate. Our

congregation is determined to do the very best we can to use this gift to expand the Lord's Kingdom work at St. Paul's.

An interesting side-note is that through a multitude of factors our church attendance has actually declined for the first time in many, many years. Though many of the factors are innocuous (members experiencing extended illnesses, moving away, changing work schedules, transferring to closer churches due to travel or work hassles, and etc.), it is a troubling trend.

So the bequest, coupled with our current challenges, launched the congregation into an extensive ministry evaluation process. The process will continue through the summer months, but we have already learned a great deal. Changes are coming! As for the use of the bequest, the current consensus among our leadership is to use it (or at least some of it) to foster extensive outreach ministry in our immediate neighborhood. This is an exciting concept, and we will see where the Lord in his grace will lead us.

God is indeed gracious, and Saint Paul Lutheran Church continues to rejoice in Him and his goodness to our congregation.

Pastor David Birsching