

I-K Lutheran

Where God is doing new things

February 2019

“Who is my neighbor in a world in which I might spend more time connected relationally to people on the other side of the globe than those across the street?”

[Dwight Zscheile]

On Christmas Day, I met for the first time our new neighbors who had moved into the house next door almost three months earlier. They happened to be outside with their kids, testing out a couple of Christmas presents, while I was walking our dogs. I was a bit embarrassed as I approached them to introduce myself. I apologized to them for not meeting and welcoming them to the neighborhood sooner. They were quite gracious, offered their own apologies, and we had a delightful getting-acquainted Christmas Day conversation with each other.

As I told my wife, Janet, about the meeting afterward, I remembered an article I had read some months before, the article from which the haunting question above comes: *Who Is My Neighbor? The Church's Vocation in an Era of Shifting Community* ([Word and World, Winter 2017](#)).¹ The author, Dwight Zscheile, is right: the shape and locus of human community is shifting significantly in this country, probably in ways that the church has not yet fully realized or begun to address.

Referencing the book, *The Vanishing Neighbor*, by Marc Dunkelman, Zscheile points out that:

Americans today spend more time with their intimates (immediate family and closest friends) as well as in an outer ring of loose social ties facilitated by social media and the Internet around specific interests. What is disappearing is the middle ring—traditionally the city neighborhood, village, or township where voluntary organizations like congregations exist. Expectations for neighborliness have changed—from block parties and potlucks, sharing tools and child care, to keeping to oneself and not interfering in your neighbor's business. Adults involved in intensive parenting spend more hours with their children, while these overscheduled children spend fewer hours roaming the neighborhood with their peers. Americans look to their devices to connect with people on social media who may be geographically far removed, ignoring the people next to them on the bus, street, or at the playground.

Not only does this shift suggest the loss of face-to-face (read: incarnational) relationships that can be nurturing and supportive, it also means that “People can now largely avoid relationships with those of differing views.” This may well be part of the reason that community in this country is so fractured and fractious...and/or part of the reason that we can't seem to find ways to live together in justice and peace, honoring differences and diversity, and working together for the common good.

So, my little Christmas Day encounter with our new neighbors has left me wondering: In this time and place, might we, the church, the body of the crucified and risen Christ, be called to intentionally and care-fully create face-to-face space for genuine local community to emerge. Might the good news of Christ crucified and risen for the life of the world be calling us to fill that “middle ring” of American life with confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation that leads to radical welcome, bold inclusion, and life together that shines with the light of new, abundant, and lasting life for all?

After all, as Dwight puts it, “In a world of eroding, divisions, and fragile community, the church stewards a most precious gift: God's restoration to communion of those once estranged in Christ, who joins us in the local, particular, and ordinary.”

Peace be with you,
Bishop William Gafkjen



¹ A PDF of the article can be downloaded from https://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/issues.aspx?article_id=3966.



Bishop's Day for Youth

INDIANA-KENTUCKY SYNOD

8th – 12th Graders and Adult Mentors



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2019

Join us on Saturday, February 23, 2019, at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Carmel, Indiana, for Bishop's Day for Youth. Registration begins at 9:30 am (continental breakfast will be available) and the day begins at 10:00 am. Students in grades 8 through 12, as well as adult chaperones, are invited to join **Bishop Bill Gafken** for conversation, worship, games, workshops, a service project, Bible study, lunch, and lots of fun. The day will finish by 3 pm.

Register by emailing Pastor Dan Fugate at dfugate@iksynod.org. Cost is just \$5 per person.

Overnight housing is available on Friday night. There is also the option of a Friday evening activity.

Please let us know if you are interested.

Last year a number of groups came on Friday evening and we had a great time!

Pilgrim Lutheran Church, 3650 West 106th Street, Carmel, IN 46032



Indiana-Kentucky Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

