



On Saturday 9 September 2017, we had a lucky number 13 gents gather for our monthly LCOC Men's Prayer Breakfast. It is always a pleasure to have such good turnouts as the banter is lively, the tales too tall to fit on these pages (generally), and the fellowship most cordial and fun filled. We were treated to a sumptuous breakfast casserole, fresh fruit, bagels, mini-scones (which real men do eat), juice and java. Lloyd said the blessing and we prayed for the victims of Hurricane Harvey in Texas, and for God's blessings for folks in the Caribbean and Florida as Hurricane Irma approached.

As we were gobbling down our tasty breakfast treats, one gent remarked that you should always let the ladies (particularly if she is a Swede) go ahead of you in the potluck food line just in case. He did not choose to expound on what he meant by "just in case", but I'm sure many of us have encountered some mystery foods at some potluck function, or even at one of those All You Can Eat buffets, that we would prefer to watch someone else sample, then decide whether or not to eat it after seeing their reaction. Speaking of food, another gent told the tale of a former church member who decided to try his luck at planting nut trees. The bad news is you never know how the harvest will go and how many nuts you will have to gather and package, but the good news is there are plenty of nut cases around if needed (just check out the TV, radio or internet for those).

Then a chap was discussing how "back in the day" when money was tight, and all of it hard earned, that his church pastor would meet him and welcome our chap to buy him a cup of coffee. And those were the days when coffee was called "coffee" and it was five cents a cup! And apparently even five cents was too valuable to toss around so freely back then. But once you put wages in perspective from those bygone days, and the tight times our nation were facing, that nickel was indeed valuable when trying to support a family and make ends meet. Makes you wonder if this generation can really relate to those times. Heck, most folks 30 and under don't know real coffee with all the lattes, mochas, cappuccinos, frappuccino's, and whatever's out there for five bucks a pop. How times change.

Lastly, we began to discuss cheap air flights. One gent remarked one flight rate was so low he had to ask if that price included a seat or would he have to sit on an apple crate or the like. Another remarked that he was amazed that some of these cheaper air carriers with their low fares actually made it to their destination. One gent recalled a flight where there were chickens in cages stacked in the rear of the cabin. And the general consensus was with those lower fares came a multitude of add-on costs, such as snacks, beverages, baggage fees, headphone fees, ticket handling fees, and on and on. One thing we could ALL agree on however is that our late arriving retired Navy Master Chief must have taken one of those cheap flights to the prayer breakfast this morning.

Dick had our devotions for the day, and he led us in a retrospective look at LCOC over the years. He facilitated our discussions of how LCOC evolved over time, from where the church started to where we are today and where we'd like to be in the future. This was a great topic given that we had at the MPB gents who were original charter members, gents who arrived early on in the church existence, and those of us who have joined across the years to include more recent members. Dick related how he was relocated by his employer from Long Island NY in the early 1970's, and after finding a house and settling in he became good friends with his neighbor who happened to be a member of LCOC. His neighbor then introduced Dick to the LCOC family, and a church that was not much more than the Fellowship Hall and downstairs areas. But it seemed the membership was growing rapidly, beginning to stretch the limits of the building.

Some of the gents talked of the days when fire struck at LCOC and groups would use a house across the street for meetings, or assemble at Neabsco School for group functions, services or other meetings. Throughout these times and into the 80's and 90's, the church continued to grow sometimes holding three services on Sundays to accommodate all the worshippers. LCOC enjoyed a large and vibrant youth group enjoying numerous activities, outings and retreats with caring and involved adult leaders. We are proud that some of our youth shared their musical talents and were members of the faith group Captive Free, while others went on to careers in the ministry. But as the demographics of the surrounding community changed, as well as the transient nature of employment or military duties evolved, so did our church membership. But we remain proud up to this day of our youth and how so many of these fine young women and men went on to college, joined the military, or became teachers, small business owners or offered their skills to the many trades and employment opportunities in the area.

We talked about the decision to build the new sanctuary and how the congregation supported the committee chosen to lead that effort. Through their dedication and hard work, and much prayer, we have enjoyed a beautiful sanctuary that has since evolved to include classrooms for a local school, repurposing of the "old" Fellowship Hall to a place where we hold many festivities, activities, concerts, celebrations, Bible Studies, pot lucks (the good kind, not like the ones mentioned above wink-wink), Sunday School rooms, office spaces and a nursery area. The vision has become a reality.

As the congregation changed over time, so did our pastors. We discussed our various experiences and memories of each, to include our guest and interim pastors, and how we benefitted from their ministries and dedication to LCOC missions and our great fortune to have been so blessed to have these wonderful women and men lead us.

Then we moved on to discuss how to grow LCOC and the challenges we face as a Lutheran Church and congregation. As mentioned earlier, the demographics of the surrounding area of LCOC is quite different from the earlier years. Has the church adapted to these changes and a new generation of people, many of whom do not regularly attend any church services or know anything about the Lutheran faith and church? LCOC is no longer a true community church as so many members have moved beyond the Dale City/Woodbridge areas. So how do we engage with neighbors of the church when our membership is so spread out and not embedded on a daily basis with our new neighbors? These are the challenges that not only LCOC faces, but a number of area Lutheran churches as well. All are seeing a similar level of dwindling church going numbers and the ministering aspect of the church to its own congregation as well as so many other outreach and mission/charitable efforts are straining budgets. We don't have answers to many of these challenges, yet, but with involved and enlightened leadership within LCOC, lots of prayers, and a past proven history of rising to these occasions and overcoming each obstacle, LCOC will stay a vibrant and welcoming covenant church.

Our **next LCOC Men's Prayer Breakfast is Saturday, 14 October 2017**. As always, the doors are open to all and we look forward to a morning of food, fun and fellowship.