

Dear Friends in Christ,

It's Advent and we begin a whole new liturgical year of worship walking our way through the longing of Advent, the joy of Christmas, the surprises of Epiphany, the struggle of Lent, the celebration of Easter, and the power of Pentecost. The Church year is designed to capture the whole experience of our life in Christ. We may want to skip a season or stay in a season, but the Christian life is dynamic and calls for us to face both the highs and the lows of life.

As we begin this new Church year, I want to say "thank you" to all the ministers of Immanuel. I have never known a Lutheran congregation that asks and expects all of its members to serve in some way. Usually the same 20 percent do everything in the church. But here at Immanuel, we have about 80 percent of our members taking turns serving the congregation as greeters, altar guild, acolytes, ushers, fellowship hosts, readers, communion assistants, musicians, tech team, child care staff, teachers, and council and committee members. And you do it cheerfully and faithfully. Thank you. People tell me that they feel welcomed by you.

Recently I have been reading information that says that, even in communities where there is a large church population, less than 20 percent of the population goes to public worship anymore. If we are a community of 5000 that means that less than a 1000 of us are at worship on any given Sunday (and/or Saturday). So when we welcome people to worship, we are welcoming people who are going against the flow of our culture. We are welcoming a unique minority in our society.

We gather on Sunday to open ourselves up to an encounter with our Lord Jesus who says that he will be present with us in Word and Sacrament and in the body gathered in his name. And then we are sent out to be missionaries in a culture that is increasingly unchurched. People don't really know what Christians believe or why we do what we do. They think of us as a club or a self-serving organization. They don't think of us as the light of the world.

None of us were really trained to be missionaries. We thought missionaries went overseas. But the mission field has come to us. So we are all called to live as if we are in a foreign mission field. So we need all of us to approach daily life in Harlan with a missionary mindset. We are living among people who don't know the good news of God's love in Jesus. We are living among people who wonder what life is really all about. They don't want to hear about our church. They want to hear about our hope. They want to see someone living with purpose and meaning. Each of us is uniquely set up to share hope with someone near us.

Yours in Christ, *Phil Nielsen*

Iowa Community Kitchen

For the past 4 years Immanuel has hosted a Christmas Dinner for the community as part of the Iowa Community Kitchen.

This year we will be serving on Tuesday, December 17, at First Baptist Church. There will be sign-up lists in the church office to provide Christmas cookies, to help cook, to serve, to provide music, and to help clean-up. Thanks for your help.

