



the CROSSWORD

Volume 12 Number 8

August 2017

Inside this issue:

Call Committee Report	2
August Calendar	3
Women of the ELCA	4
Youth and Sunday School News; Camp Thank You cards	5
Church Information and Celebrations	6
Prayers & Cares	7
August Worship Leaders	8

Coming Events

- August 6**
 Splashway Waterpark Sunday school summer trip, 10:30am
 LaBahia Nursing Home worship service, 3pm
- August 6 and August 13**
 Blessing of Backpacks
- August 13**
 Meet and Greet with the Rev. Anne Kolmeier and her husband, Jerry, 3pm
 Worship service, 4pm, followed by congregational meeting
 Pot Luck Meal, 5:30pm
- August 20**
 Rally Day; Commissioning of teachers
 SparkHouse summer study for families and noon meal
- August 27**
 Youth Group planning meeting and swim party, 2-4pm



Addison and Ainsley Yendrey enjoy the kitchen activity treat they helped make during a SparkHouse Family Summer Study session.



Jill Wiggins helps with the craft as Karolynn Youngblood and Conner Collins create a beautiful cross card at a SparkHouse Family Summer Study session.

Update on SparkHouse Family Summer Study

Due to the change in worship schedule on Sunday, August 13, the lesson "Jesus Turns Water to Wine" has been moved to Sunday, August 20. There will not be a lesson on August 13. It will be combined with "Jesus Calms the Storm" for one giant-sized, super-splashed lesson to go along with our Rally Day celebration.

The session will include Bible stories, object lessons, crafts, kitchen activities, and songs. Activities will begin at 10:15a.m., with a meal and water games at 12p.m. Feel free to bring a *Spark Story Bible* from home, or you may borrow one from the church. Bring your swim suit and towel. All ages welcome!

Call Committee and Council unanimously vote to recommend pastoral candidate

By Sherry Sanders

On their regular meeting night, July 20, council met Pastor Anne Kolmeier and her husband, Jerry. Following a time to visit and ask questions, the council discussed candidate with the call committee, followed by a unanimous vote to recommend her as the primary candidate to the congregation of St. Peter's, and a

unanimous vote approving the compensation package tentatively presented to her prior to the meeting. The council then set August 13 for the date to invite her to lead worship and preach a sermon, followed by a called congregational meeting to vote to extend a call to Pr. Anne.

Credit card procedures were again discussed, the recent obtainment of a

—continued on page 2—

Call Committee Report

By Sarah Brandes

The committee met on Monday, July 10 to conduct a phone interview with a pastoral candidate. Upon completion of the interview and previous weeks of reading through the applicant's paperwork, the committee decided to release the candidate's name back to the synod office. The committee then conducted a vote and decided to unanimously recommend Pastor Anne Kolmeier to congregational council as our final pastoral candidate. Her energy, enthusiasm, and talents in rural ministry provided plenty of opportunities for the committee to witness how she would be a match for the needs of our congregation. The committee has spent months getting to know Pastor Anne through email contacts, phone conversations, a recorded sermon, phone interview, personal interview, and a variety of supplemental information that Pastor Anne made available to us.

Since the committee's vote, we have since worked with congregational council to provide background information discovered through the interview process and assisted in arranging an opportunity for council to meet Pastor Anne. The committee also put together a candidate biography of Pastor Anne to be mailed to the congregation. We invite congregation members to read through the biography and visit with us to learn more about Pastor Anne. It would be our pleasure to share with you in more detail why we feel she is the best candidate for our congregation.

Join us as we pray—

Almighty God, giver of all good gifts: We give you thanks for the talents of Pastor Anne and her openness to hear your call in ministry. Be with us and guide us as we consider her to be among us to lead us and walk with us into future ministry. We pray that you will open our eyes to new possibilities, and opportunities of being your people. We pray in your Son's name, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

— congregation council meeting report continued from page 1—

Sam's membership and credit card were approved by council, and it was decided to keep using credit cards as has been done with the goal to have several key members be authorized users of only one credit card and cancel the other.

Kenneth Brand, chair of Property, informed council on updated bid for the work at the picnic area with plans for called congregational meeting on July 30 to inform congregation and approve bid so work can proceed.

Kenneth shared the Columbarium contract with dates and amounts of payment due, order to be placed and deposit paid as soon as it can be accomplished. He reported the concrete work is finished for the columbarium and the ramps at the picnic area and those have been paid, and some air conditioning work has been resolved. He added future plans for property include a wheelchair ramp on the front steps of the building which would be under the canopy. There was a discussion about reminding members and visitors to please park in places other than the spaces reserved for handicapped parking, as happened on one Sunday. He agreed to contact Cross Trails to invite a representative to visit prior to Octoberfest and the day of Octoberfest since they will be the recipient of funds raised.

Following a recommendation from Beverly Martin, Chair of Worship and Music, council decided to change the Contemporary Service in September to the first Sunday, and make September 17 a Communion Sunday as that is when Bishop Tiemann will be visiting, along with organ music and choir song. Sherry Sanders reported she was unable to get a supply pastor for July 23 so she will be leading the worship service with no communion that day.

Eva Nell Griffith, chair of Christian Education and Youth, reminded council of special upcoming dates, and asked for suggestions for projects for God's Work, Our Hands Day on September 10. She reported that conversations have taken place in plans for new confirmation class, but with the possibility of a new pastor being here soon, they will wait to see what happens. There was some discussion of materials and dissatisfaction with materials used in the past. Eva Nell also reported that work on how to display Cemetery Plat has resumed.

Chair of Outreach, Billy Dornburg, reported the next worship service at

La Bahia nursing home will be August 6, with special effort being made to have a good showing. He stated he had worked with the new pastor at the Methodist church in Goliad to reschedule the following worship service at La Bahia from October 29, Octoberfest Sunday, to October 22. Stewardship and Finance chair, David Bowman, reported they will meet on July 27.

Notice of August 13 Called Congregational Meeting

The congregation council has called a congregational meeting to be held immediately following the 4p.m. worship service on Sunday, August 13, 2017. The purpose of this called meeting is to vote on extending a call to a pastoral candidate for St. Peter's Lutheran Church, the Rev. Anne Kolmeier, and if needed, approve the tentatively agreed upon compensation package.

Opportunity for Youth

St. Peter's currently has an opportunity for a youth who is looking for a service project for 4-H or scouting, or just wanting to volunteer in another way. For several years, we have been recycling bulletins and the person who has been following up with this job is unable to continue in this capacity. If you are interested, please contact Sherry Sanders, 361-655-0123, Eva Nell Griffith, 361-649-3882, or Sandra Post, 361-649-5127.

Help from all members

A couple of things have come to the attention of council that require the help of the congregation. In order to secure our property, we are asking that the last person leaving the building make sure the office doors and the sacristy room are locked and all outer doors are completely closed. Also, anyone needing to update the prayer list, please write it on the list provided for this purpose on the table in the narthex. Thanks to all for their help!

August

2017

Tue Aug 1, 2017—Fri Aug 4, 2017
 Alexis Gerhardt and Mackenna
 Coleman-Diebel attending camp at
 Camp Chrysalis

Sun Aug 6, 2017
 9am Worship service—
 Blessing of Backpacks
 10:30am Summer trip to
 Splashway Waterpark
 3pm Worship service at La Bahia
 Nursing Home

Mon Aug 7, 2017
 6:30pm Worship and Music
 meeting

Tue Aug 8, 2017
 3pm Women of the ELCA
 meeting

Sun Aug 13, 2017
THERE WILL BE NO 9am
WORSHIP SERVICE THIS DAY
 3pm Meet and Greet with Pastor
 Anne Kolmeier and her
 husband, Jerry
 4pm Worship service—
 Blessing of Backpacks, Pastor
 Anne Kolmeier presiding,
 followed by Called
 Congregational Meeting
 5:30pm Pot-Luck Meal

Wed Aug 16, 2017
 9am Lutheran World Relief
 workday

Thu Aug 17, 2017
 6:30pm Congregation Council
 meeting

Sun Aug 20, 2017
 9am Contemporary service; Rally
 Day and Commissioning of
 Sunday School Teachers
 10am SparkHouse Summer Study;
 Jesus Changes Water to Wine
 and Jesus Calms the Storm;
 Rally Day Celebration!
 12pm Meal and water games

Sun Aug 27, 2017
 9am Communion service
 10:15am Sunday School
 2-4pm Youth Group planning
 meeting and swim party at
 the Jarzombek residence



**God's work.
 Our hands.**

**Annual "God's work. Our hands." day of
 service scheduled for September 10**

"God's work. Our hands." is an opportunity to celebrate who we are as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA): one church, freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor.

Plans are still being formed and discussed for St. Peter's participation in the dedicated day of service on Sunday, September 10, but everyone is asked to mark this

date on their calendar and plan to help with a special service activity.

Service activities offer an opportunity for us to explore one of our most basic convictions as Lutherans: that all of life in Jesus Christ – every act of service, in every daily calling, in every corner of life – flows freely from a living, daring confidence in God's grace.

WOMEN OF THE ELCA



Items needed for Lutheran World Relief school kits

Imagine having to choose between a meal or purchasing a notebook. Lutheran World Relief School Kits are sent to places where even the few required school supplies may be more than a family can afford. Pencils and paper can help write a positive future.

School kit items include —

- **FOUR:** 70-sheet notebooks of wide- or college-ruled paper, approximately 8" x 10 1/2"; no loose leaf paper
- **ONE** 30-centimeter ruler, or a ruler with centimeters on one side and inches on the other
- **ONE** pencil sharpener
- **ONE** pair of blunt scissors (safety scissors with embedded steel blades work well)
- **FIVE** unsharpened #2 pencils with erasers; secure together with a rubber band
- **FIVE** black or blue ballpoint pens (no gel ink); secure together with a rubber band
- **ONE** box of 16 or 24 crayons
- **ONE** 2 1/2" eraser

Members of St. Peter's Women of the ELCA will be sewing the school drawstring backpacks to complete the school kit requirements. With your help

the bags can be filled with school supplies! School supplies are going on sale at our local retailers. It is very easy to purchase the contents for one backpack for \$5 or less, if you shop the "back to school" sales. St. Peter's can meet the 2017 goal for Lutheran World Relief school kits, if each member of St. Peter's will help by donating the school supply items. Cards listing the needed school items are available on the Lutheran World Relief display table in the parish hall.

If there are any questions regarding Lutheran World Relief donations or kit items, please contact Linda Dornburg, coordinator for St. Peter's Women of the ELCA Lutheran World Relief.



On Sunday, July 16, following worship, St. Peter's shared a meal and a documentary movie on the life of Martin Luther, as part of their yearlong observation of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Summer reminders for St. Peter Women of the ELCA

- St. Peter's Women of the ELCA will hold their next regular meeting at 3p.m. on August 8. Bible study will not be held prior to this meeting.
- Our next summer Lutheran World Relief quilting workday will be held on August 16, beginning at 9a.m.
- Southwestern Texas Synodical Women's Convention to be held September 29—October 1, 2017 at YO Ranch Hotel in Kerrville. Registration forms are on the bulletin board in the parish hall.
- Remember to take advantage of "Back to School" sales for school items needed for Lutheran World Relief. Check out the LWR displays and pick up a shopping list for school kit items.



Youth Group to hold August 27 Swimming Party and Planning Meeting

Youth of all ages are invited to a swimming party and planning meeting on Sunday, August 27, from 2-4p.m. at the Jarzombek residence. We will plan activities for the fall and discuss upcoming leadership opportunities for youth. Information on the 2018 ELCA National Youth Gathering will also be provided! Youth are invited to bring their favorite snack to share with the group; drinks will be provided.



Everyone enjoys a time for sharing and listening to the Bible stories from the Spark Story Bible at the SparkHouse Family Summer Study sessions.



Zayne Parma and Maely Brandes just can't hardly believe how much fun they are having at the SparkHouse Family Summer Study sessions!



Fischer Saxton enjoyed helping with worship and the fun camp songs while attending Lyle 1 at Camp Chrystalis.



Ready for a swim? Marleigh Luker and Karolynn Youngblood spent a fantastic week, along with eight other youth that were sponsored by St. Peter's, at Lutherhill during July.

Sunday School trip to Splashway on August 6

St. Peter's Sunday School summer trip will be to Splashway Family Waterpark in Sheridan on August 6, after the Sunday morning service. A sign-up sheet has been placed in the narthex. Entrance fees are as follows: over 42" tall, \$34.99; under 42" tall, \$24.99; senior citizens, \$25.99; and under 2 years old are free. Please indicate the number in each price category on the sign-up page.

Camp Thank you notes —

Dear Members of St. Peter's,
Thank you so much for supporting me to go to camp this summer! Lyle 1 was a fantastic experience that I will not soon forget, and I am planning on participating in the Lyle 2 program next year.
Thanks again!
Fischer Saxton

Dear Saint Peter's,
I would like to thank the congregation and the Women of the ELCA for the opportunity to go to camp. I enjoyed everything about camp, especially singing and swimming. Thank you again!
Love,
Addison Yendrey

Dear St. Peter's Lutheran Church,
Thank you for helping pay for my week at Lutherhill. I have helped at work weekends with St. Peter's, but this was my first time to go to a full week of camp. Camp was really fun and I enjoyed swimming in the pool. The food was very good. I made friends with some of the Lyles because they were fun and made me feel better when I was hurt. Aaron, my cabin leader, helped me understand the lessons in Bible study. We "love bombed" the other cabins for Bible study on Wednesday and did a rock labyrinth for Thursday's Bible study. We had a canteen, where we played games and had snacks. The people at the canteen were nice. I led "Pharaoh, Pharaoh" during morning worship. Thank you again for the chance to learn more about Jesus through camp.
Sincerely,
Gregory Schoener

I want to thank all members of St. Peter's Lutheran Church and the Women of St. Peter's ELCA for assisting my camping experience. I enjoyed it so much. I am looking forward to going back to Lutherhill next year.
Thanks again,
Zachariah Sturm

St. Peter's Lutheran Church and Women of the ELCA,
Please accept my thanks with gratitude for helping me attend camp at Lutherhill. I liked the camp so well I want to go back next year.
Brennan Briscoe

St. Peter's Staff

The Rev. Joseph Wold
Transitional Minister

Kathy Albrecht
Church Office Secretary

Dorothy Bowman
Organist and Choir
Director

Congregation Council

David Bowman
Co-Chair of Stewardship
and Finance
(term ends 12/31/18)

Kenneth Brand
Co-Chair of Property
(term ends 12/31/18)

Billy Dornburg
Chair of Outreach
(term ends 12/31/17)

Dalton Dornburg
Vice Chair of Christian
Education and Youth Ministry
(term ends 12/31/17)

Eva Nell Griffith
Vice President and Chair of
Christian Education
and Youth Ministry
(term ends 12/31/19)

Beverly Martin
Chair of Worship and Music
(term ends 12/31/17)

Sandra Post
Secretary and Co-Chair of
Stewardship
and Finance
(term ends 12/31/18)

Sherry Sanders
President
(term ends 12/31/19)

Terrell Wiggins
Co-Chair of Property
(term ends 12/31/19)

The Rev. Joe Wold
Transitional Pastor (ex-officio)

Worship Schedule

Sunday Worship: 9:00 a.m.
Sunday School: 10:15 a.m.—
11:00 a.m. (Sept. - May)
Holy Communion: second,
fourth, and fifth Sundays of
each month, throughout the
Easter season, and on all
festivals



AUGUST BIRTHDAYS

8-04	Marilyn Morris
8-07	Lana Jarzombek
8-09	Bonnie Bates
8-11	Jon Adickes
8-11	June Bethke
8-11	Brad Burke
8-11	Nathan Smith
8-12	Nancy Gerhardt
8-14	Dorothy Bowman
8-15	Gerald Griffith
8-15	Deanna Wacker
8-15	Mac Wimberly
8-16	Sandy Sanders
8-18	Lori Collins
8-20	Glenn Karnei
8-21	Margaret Luker
8-21	Elaine Post
8-22	Marleigh Luker
8-25	Valerie Albrecht
8-28	Jillian Griffith
8-27	Cameron Krueger
8-31	Mary Schmidt

St. Peter's Ministry Fund Update Through June 31, 2017

Ministry fund beginning balance, January 1, 2017	\$24,057.45
Offerings	\$109,754.99
Cost of ministries	\$70,251.25
Ministry fund ending balance, June 30, 2017	\$63,561.19

Note: St. Peter's Ministry Fund (previously known as the current fund and the general operating fund) includes all of St. Peter's regular, budgeted ministries, including ELCA Mission Support. It does not include designated gifts to the building fund, memorials, or other non-budgeted designated gifts.



AUGUST ANNIVERSARIES

8-1-1970	Rev. Michael & Karen Robinson
8-9-2014	Ashley & Jaron Post
8-21-1977	Jill & Terrell Wiggins
8-27-1966	Marilyn & Tom Morris
8-28-2004	Melanie and Boyd Schendel

If any listings of birthdays or anniversaries are incorrect, or if a listing is missing, please contact the church office at 645-2922 or office@stpetersander.org

Membership Updates:

Address Change:

Garrett Friedrichs
200 Marion Pugh Dr. Apt 814
College Station, Texas 77840-2777

ELCA Missionary Supported by St. Peter's

The Rev. Dr. Carolyn Schneider
#3 To Fung Shan Road
Shatin, N.T.
Hong Kong, SAR
carolyn.schneider@elca.org



St. Peter's Ander



Valerie Albrecht – member of St. Peter's Family of Robert Angerstein – friend of community and member of St. Luke's Schoreder

Allene Bethke – mother-in-law of June Bethke

Dawn Butler – sister of Lana Jarzombek and Ronda Irwin

Doris Doehrmann – aunt of Ray Albrecht

Denise Engle – friend of Amy Wilburn

Joyce Foster – grandmother of Shelby Foster

Robbie Friedrichs – friend of June Bethke

Janie Garcia – co-worker of Jamie Friedrichs

Ainsley Garza – cousin of Arlene DeForest and Eva Nell Griffith

Barry Geary – member of St. Peter's

Kerry Giles – son-in-law of Sherry and Sandy Sanders

Rebecca Graves – infant great-niece of Joyce Franklin, friend of Alvin and Arlene DeForest

Kyndal Gruetzmacher – student at Goliad High School

Milton Haas – friend of Alvin and Arlene DeForest

The Rev. Bill Hassel – retired Bluebonnet Conference pastor

Dale Henderson – father of Margaret Luker

Vanita Ann Hausmann Homer – friend of Brenda and Aldon Bade

Betty Jacob – friend of June Bethke

Ryan Janak – eight year old nephew of Leo Henke

Nora Karl – great-grandmother of Shelby Foster

Family of Gilbert Krueger – grandfather of David Krueger; uncle of Arlene DeForest, Eva Nell Griffith, and Kathy Albrecht

Joe Ladeairous – father of Regina Calhoun

Herbie Maurer – brother of Brenda Bade

Vernette McMullen – member of St. Peter's

Bryce Ousley – student at Goliad High School, friend of Wendi Yendrey

Jordan Peterson – husband to be of Carolyn Well's step-granddaughter

Ruth Pieper – friend of the community and member of St. Luke's, Schroeder

Allen Pollard – father of Karie Wimberly

Mary Poppert – sister of Ina DeForest and Alvin DeForest

Marcus Rezendez – friend of Amy Wilburn

Jack Robinson – grandfather of Fischer Saxton

Debra Rouse – friend of Wanda Schendel

James Rung – five year old son of friend of Greta Henke

Katherine Sauer – grandmother of Jarrett Yendrey

Stefani Soper – friend of Karen Klinkerman

Bonnie Staha – friend of Jamie Friedrichs

Barbara Stall – cousin of Arlene DeForest and Eva Nell Griffith

Patricia Stanley – co-worker of Gayle Albrecht

Kathy Sturm – daughter of Fritz and Geraldine Sturm

Chuck Taylor – father of Ashford Taylor

Wayne Timmerman – friend of Pam and Ted Long

Glenn Lane Towery and family – friends of the community

Victor Vargas – four year old nephew of Alyssa, Luke Abrameit's wife

James White – friend of Allen and Ruby Jank

Sharon Wilborn – friend of Beverly Martin

Mike Wilburn – member of St. Peter's

G.T. Yendrey – grandfather of Jarrett Yendrey

Zander York – member of St. Peter's grandson of Bob and Nancy Gerhardt

Buddy Young – friend of Allen and Ruby Jank

Students and Teachers at Goliad School

Homebound:

Barry Geary, 1403 Gohmert Rd., Cuero, TX 77954, phone 361-275-5591

Bishop Tiemann to visit St. Peter's

Bishop Tiemann will visit and conduct a 9a.m. communion service at St. Peter's on Sunday, September 17, 2017. He is visiting selected congregations this year and will be available to preach in worship, teach a class, lead a Bible Study, meet with youth, lead a question and answer time, or lead a mission conversation. There will be more information on his visit as plans are made, but mark your calendar to be here for his visit.

Lutherhill Ministries 11th Annual S'mores and Champagne Gala set for September 9

Lutherhill Ministries cordially invites you to the Eleventh Annual S'mores and Champagne Gala on Saturday, September 9, 2017, at The Woodlands Waterway Marriott Hotel at 6p.m. For more information, visit their website at www.lutherhill.org/gala

Silent auction, live auction, raffle, wine wall, wishing wall, dinner and dancing will be the activities offered for the Gala.

A room block has been set up at the Woodlands Waterway Marriott Hotel for the night of the Gala. Please contact the hotel directly or make reservations online: The Woodlands Waterway Marriott (location of the Gala), 1601 Lake Robbins Drive, The Woodlands, TX 77380; phone 800-262-1509. Lutherhill Ministries rate: \$169/night + tax.

Births celebrated by church families



Fritz and Geraldine Sturm are proud to announce the arrival of their great granddaughter, Audry Jordan Smith, on July 5, 2017. Marshall and Lindsey Smith are the proud parents.

Gary and Deanna Wacker are proud to announce the arrival of their great grandson, Charlie Vincent Wacker, on July 23, 2017. Todd and Shay Wacker are the proud parents.

Congratulations and God's blessings extended to the new families!



St. Peter's Lutheran Church
1545 E. FM 1961
Goliad, TX 77963-3414

Phone/Fax: 361-645-2922
E-mail: office@stpetersander.org
www.stpetersander.org

The Rev. Joseph Wold, transitional minister
Phone: 830-632-5471 or 248-330-4274
E-mail: joearlywold@yahoo.com

Worship Leaders for August

ALTAR GUILD

Brenda Bade and Amy Wilburn

GREETERS

Arlene DeForest and Loyce McCullough

USHERS

Alvin DeForest and Delbert McCullough

OFFERING COUNTERS

Kathy Albrecht and Valerie Albrecht

MINISTER OF HOSPITALITY

Terrell Wiggins

FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

Jamie Friedrichs and Annie Schwin

FLOWERS

8-6 Ina DeForest
8-13 Dorothy and David Bowman
8-20 open
8-27 Linda and Randy Koehler



SparkHouse Family Summer Study's

FINAL DIVE

&

RALLY day

Celebration!

SUNDAY AUGUST 20TH

Join us as we dive into our last lessons of the SparkHouse Family Summer Study series and ride the wave in to another great year of Sunday School!

9:00 am— Worship & Installation of Sunday School Teachers

10:15 am - SparkHouse Family Summer Study lessons

Jesus turns Water to Wine

Jesus Calms the Storm

12:00 pm - Meal and water games

BRING YOUR SWIM SUIT AND TOWEL!



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Dear Friends and Companions in the church's mission,

June 2017

Greetings to you in this Pentecost season, when our Sunday worship focuses on the growth of the church and of each one of us in the church. Since Pentecost spans the whole summer it is also a time when those of us who are students and teachers break from the normal routine to explore new things: a summer job, a trip somewhere, Vacation Bible School, intensive research, or just some needed rest. Although I am based in Hong Kong this summer, I am making three trips: to Xi'an, a city in Shaanxi Province, in the middle of China; to several locations in Fujian Province, on the southeastern coast of China; and to Yangon, the former capital of Myanmar and still its biggest city. In this newsletter I invite you to share my experiences in Xi'an; the next two newsletters will be about Fujian and Myanmar.

News organizations often report on the amazing growth of Christianity in China today. But few people, inside or outside China, realize that Christianity is not new in China; it goes back 1,400 years to the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), when Syriac-speaking missionary-monks of the Assyrian Church of the East (a church still surviving in Iraq) traveled with merchants along the Silk Route through Central Asia to reach Chang-an (now Xi'an), the capital of the Tang Dynasty. They arrived in 635 and were given permission to stay, worship and talk freely about the God they worshiped. Here is how one priest expressed the essence of Christianity for the Emperor Suzong, using words familiar to Chinese Buddhists and Taoists, sometime between 756 and 762 AD:

The True Lord of the Primordial Void, in absolute stillness and constant naturalness, crafted and nourished all things. He raised the earth and established the sky. He took on human form and His compassion was limitless. The sun rises; darkness is banished; and we are witnesses to the true wonder.

Maybe it's not exactly how you or I would say it, but we are all challenged to speak the gospel in ways that reach others where they are. How do you do it where you are?



Most people go to Xi'an to see the thousands of life-sized terracotta soldiers buried with the founder of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), which are truly impressive. But the highlights for me were different. I was drawn to the large stone tablet telling the story of the earliest Christianity in China and to the 8th-century Christian Da Qin monastery built like a Buddhist pagoda, from which the tablet probably came, although now the stone sits with similar monuments in the Beilin ("Forest of Stone Monuments") museum in Xi'an.



China is rightly proud of the Tang Dynasty, a golden age, and has worked hard to restore Xi'an to some of its former glory. This is part of the reconstructed city wall of Xi'an.



Inscribed in Chinese in 781 AD, the stele (stone tablet) sits on a turtle, signifying that its message is divine.



The Da Qin Monastery, built in 781, is probably the source of the stone tablet.

The stone tablet begins with a summary of the biblical story of creation and salvation and describes the Christian scriptures. It calls Christianity the “Religion of Light” and says its teachings “are like the resplendent sun: they have the power to dissolve the dark realm and destroy evil forever.” The stone spells out the benefits that the Religion of Light brings to the Chinese people (or to any people, including Americans, I might add): “to penetrate the mysteries, to bless with a good conscience, to be great and yet empty, to return to stillness and be forgiving, to be compassionate and to deliver all people, to do good deeds and help people reach the other shore, ...to calm people in stormy times, to help them understand the nature of things, to maintain purity, to nourish all things, to respect all life, and to answer the needs of those whose beliefs come from the heart.” The text ends by saying that the stone was erected on a sunny day near the forest “in the second year of [Emperor] Jianzheng” (781 AD).

On a rainy day, Mr. Xu, a teacher from the Shaanxi Bible Institute in Xi’an, drove me to that forest an hour outside of Xi’an. There, about 20 years ago, British scholar Martin Palmer discovered the only surviving Christian monastery from the Tang Dynasty, the source of the stone. Palmer tells the story in his book, *The Jesus Sutras* (New York: Ballantine, 2001), which is where my quotations from the stone come from. Palmer suspected that a pagoda called the Da Qin Pagoda had actually been built for Christian monks, not Buddhists, because “Da Qin” was the Chinese name for the “Great Empire” to the west of China during the Tang Dynasty, the Christian Byzantine Empire. Palmer’s hunch was strengthened when he saw the building and noticed that it faces east, like a church, not south, like a Buddhist or Taoist pagoda. The 115-year-old Buddhist nun living in the pagoda at that time affirmed that, indeed, everyone knew that this had been built as a Christian monastery. Since then, Chinese archaeologists have confirmed it.

In the dynasties that followed the Tang, the churches and monasteries the missionaries of the Church of the East founded were suppressed, but these precious remnants have survived in Xi’an. The living church of people has also survived, although in different church bodies.

Today the rural area around the Da Qin Monastery has a large Christian population, mostly Roman Catholic, and we saw many large Catholic churches there. In Xi'an itself, I worshiped at a 100-year-old Protestant church on Sunday. It is now one of China's officially registered churches. I don't know what the sermon was about, but I do know that the friendly man sitting next to me who had some kind of muscle disorder had learned every verse of every song by heart and sang them with gusto. Something good is going on there, as it has for hundreds of years. I pray the same for the church where you live.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Schneider

Associate Professor of Church History
The Lutheran Theological Seminary
50 To Fung Shan Road
Shatin, N.T.
Hong Kong SAR

Carolyn.schneider@elca.org

P.S. In the years before I came to Hong Kong I was writing a book about a manuscript that is part of Egyptian church history. I am so grateful that it has now been published. The book is *The Text of a Coptic Monastic Discourse, On Love and Self-Control: Its Story from the Fourth Century to the Twenty-First*. Cistercian Studies Series 272. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2017.

P.P.S.

Your support makes a world of difference. Here is how to give:

1. By check: Make payable to "ELCA Global Church Sponsorship" with "Carolyn Schneider (GCS2016)" in the memo line. Give through your synod office or mail your check to:

ELCA Global Church Sponsorship
ELCA Gift Processing Center
P.O. Box 1809
Merrifield, VA 22116-8009

2. By credit or debit card: See <https://community.elca.org/HongKong> or call 800-638-3522 and specify "Carolyn Schneider (GCS2016)".

3. By automatic monthly bank withdrawal, or to establish a covenant of prayer, communication and support: Contact 800-638-3522, ext. 2657, or globalchurch@elca.org.



Members of the Shi Ji Du congregation in Xi'an leaving after worship on Sunday.