



First of the Month @ CLC

January 1, 2022

Dear Christ Lutheran Church,

Welcome to the Year of our Lord 2022. I have not heard that phrase (*Year of our Lord*) in a very long time. It has the hint of Old English, like something you would read from William Shakespeare. And the truth of the matter is it assumes that Jesus was born in the year 0, but based on the dating of the government officials Luke names in the third chapter of his Gospel (*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee...*), it is fairly well agreed upon by scholars that Jesus was born somewhere around 6 to 4 B.C. (which is rather confusing since "B.C." stands for "Before Christ," therefore Jesus was born before he was believed to be born!).

But at any rate, it is quite appropriate for us people of faith to declare that this is the "year of our Lord" (or as they say in Latin, *Anno Domini*). We say so because, for us, every year is a year given to us as a gift from God, and every new year holds the promise of our Lord's leading and guidance. And dare I say, we need such divine providence now as much as ever.

We are approaching the two-year mark of being disrupted by a pandemic. There appears to be no clear idea when (if?) we will no longer be threatened by infection. As a nation, we have reached the 800,000 death total (5.41 million globally). Our health care workers have been pushed to the limits. Many have felt economic stress. We are seeing evidence that school children are violently acting out as a result of restricted social interaction. We would be wise to be prepared for further effects to come.

Needless to say, your church has been affected. As stated in a previous "First of the Month" letter, roughly 25% of our membership has chosen to connect remotely with worship. Another 15-20% we simply do not know about (are they quietly or sporadically worshipping on-line, or have they left the church?). In a brief overview, participation in Sunday school, small groups, Bible studies, and fellowship events has declined in the past two years. We are, in many respects, a different church than where we were at the beginning of 2020.

What has not changed is our dedication to our mission (*In learning to love like Jesus we are becoming a community transformed by grace*) and values (*Connect courageously; Grow spiritually; Serve selflessly; Accept boldly; Give freely*). But we are attempting to be the church and do our ministry in new ways.

We have devoted increased resources to our live stream worship. Soon, those who worship on-line will see better camera angles, smoother transitions, and easier-to-follow worship. Thank you to those who have provided the financial assistance to make this a reality.

It is understandable that there are those who choose to remain distanced from on campus worship due to the pandemic. It is unwise for anyone who is immunocompromised, in danger of severe sickness, or fearful of spreading the virus to susceptible individuals, to gather indoors with large crowds. To that end, we are glad we are able to offer on-line worship. But I think it also must be said that on-line worship is not meant to be an excuse to sleep in on Sunday mornings. If members are well enough to attend indoor sporting events, go to theaters and concerts, work out at the gym, and/or be active in their service club, it stands to reason they should feel comfortable being present in worship (masked and refraining from close contact with others).

While on-line worship is now a reality, it cannot be the only way to live out one's faith. Worship by itself is not enough. It never has been. As important as weekly worship is, nowhere in the Scriptures will you find that worship alone is sufficient to maintain a vital faith. We are created by God to connect in supportive ways with others (Galatians 6:2), to model the life of faith in doing good (Colossians 3:17), and to be involved in a life of ministry (Ephesians 4:1-3). To this end our on-line worshippers will be invited and encouraged to be active in some sort of ministry of the church while maintaining distance. Watch for new ways these members of the church can utilize the gifts God has given them and stay connected with the body of Christ at CLC while keeping a physical distance from the church campus.

Our worship theme for the month of January is "Renew." I hope our membership, whether on campus or on-line, will renew their commitment to God and to the church as we step forward into the adventure that awaits us in 2022. There will be increased opportunities for ministry involvement, studies, and spiritual growth in the year to come. Obviously, I hope for a reduction, and eventual elimination, of restrictions due to the pandemic. But until that happens, my desire is to better engage our membership, and have our membership more fully engaged in ministry.

Good news (if you haven't heard already) – we hired Kurt Salierno to be our Director of Administration. Many of you know Kurt and have seen his commitment to the homeless. He will continue to be the director of My Father's House ministry with the help of his wife, Pam. But he will lend critical help to CLC in a part-time basis beginning January 1. Please pray for Kurt as he settles into this new position.

And January 1 will also see the start of Paul Delgado as our Director of Music Ministries, and shift Lauren Chambers from Director of Relational Ministries to Director of Adult Ministries. Please pray for Paul and Lauren as they do great things for God through CLC.

2022 Anno Domini. There may be no better way to describe the year to come. We are at the mercy of God. As children of God, we are dependent on God for our well-being and eternal hope. We remember how God has answered our prayers and saved us in the past, and we build on that memory as we anticipate how God might show up in the year to come. Our confidence lay not with ourselves, but solely on God. May we be found faithful when all is said and done. And may this prayer be on our lips:

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Peace,

Pastor Brian Malison



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