

Raising faith in

The Backyard

with a passion for generous stewardship

December 2008



God's work. Our hands.

The title above is the new vision statement for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which consists of 10,470 congregations throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. We are one of those congregations and what is interesting is that we have an outreach fund known as "Hosanna Helping Hands Fund."

Our hands doing God's work, making a huge difference in the lives of individuals and families who need food, shelter, gasoline, even Huggies and Pampers. People stop in at Hosanna and ask for help, and we offer them all that we can, as we are able. It is pretty amazing to minister with "the strangers" who come to our door because our "helping hands" embrace them and we quickly become friends, all in the name of Jesus.

At the present time, our Helping Hands Fund is rather low. We have helped so many people that it has been nearly depleted. If you would like to help build it back up, simply designate your special gift to "Hosanna Helping Hands" and place it in the offering plate on Sunday, send it via mail or bring your gift into the office.

Always trust that your gift will make a difference in someone's life in the near future. Thanks!

— Pastor John

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:13

Did you know

? ...that on Wednesday, December 10, the Men of Hosanna and the Confirmation Class will put together **141** Christmas gift boxes for the Seafarers Center at the Port of Houston. **Wow!**

Men... you still can sign up on the poster in the welcome center to help Bob McConnell during that day and into that evening.

Noisy Offering

December 21



There are many members at Hosanna Lutheran Church who have fond and clear memories of when we were just starting out as a new mission in North Houston. Did you know that we met for worship for a few years at Bammel Elementary School? Setting up and taking down everything for worship actually took longer than the worship itself (so some have told me)! The years go by after settling into a permanent space and the memory of those years fades a bit, no doubt.

On Sunday, December 21, we will host a representative from a congregation that is just beginning called Joyful Life Lutheran Church in The Woodlands. They are a new ELCA mission and they meet in a school for worship every Sunday. They will worship on Christmas Eve in that same space. They have grown to 42 families and they all pitch in to set up for worship and take down after worship. For leadership meetings they meet in someone's home. It's a very different pace of life in such a parish setting. They have a five-acre plot of on which they hope to build early in 2009. It's really exciting and we have an opportunity to hear their story and share an offering on December 21. We can help them move along in this new venture. Scott Cigich is their

pastor and (at the time of this writing) we are hoping he can be with us that day to preach, lead worship and share what God is up to at Joyful Life. Pastor John will be going up to Joyful Life to preach and lead worship there.

So, save your coins and your "silent change" and let's surprise them with our Noisy Offering on Sunday, December 21st!

Did you know



...that the average Lutheran invites another person to worship ***once*** every fifteen years?

Maybe you and I can "adjust" that average and invite a friend to worship with us on Christmas Eve.

(Services are at 4:30 and 7 PM)

Glimpses of Grace — 2008

World Hunger	\$545.00
African Initiative	\$20,061.00
Mission of the Month	\$3469.19
Mulkey Fund Income	\$4470.08
Benevolence	\$13,807.34
Turkeys for NAM	\$275.00

(Amounts year-to-date)

Mission of the Month Gifts:

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan	\$218.29
Lutherhill Campership Fund	\$259.39
Wholeness Project of Lutheran Social Services	\$145.63
God's Global Barnyard	\$182.88
Lutheran Seminary Scholarship Fund	\$203.45
NAM Back to School	\$582.50
ELCA Disaster Response	\$804.00
ELCA Disaster Response (2nd time after Ike)	\$337.07
Seafarers Project	\$433.05
Water 2 Thrive	\$366.93

Helping Hands Fund

July: Two families received money for food, gas, assistance and items from the food pantry.

August: Six families received money for food, school supplies, assistance, also items from the food pantry.

September: Four families received money for housing and gas, also items from the food pantry.

October: One family (hurricane Ike evacuees) received aid.

Balance on hand (November 30): \$365.81

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." Galatians 5:22-23

Did you know



...the IRA charitable rollover is back!

October 3, 2008, Congress passed and the president signed the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, legislation that extended an excellent charitable planning opportunity for both 2008 and 2009. This act provides an excellent opportunity to make tax-free charitable gifts from your IRA directly to eligible charities, including schools, colleges and universities.

Such gifts can:

- Count toward your required minimum distribution for each year.
- Be excluded from your gross income (a tax free rollover).

To qualify for benefits under the extension:

- You must be 70 1/2 or older at time of gift.
- The transfer must go directly from the IRA to eligible institution of your choosing.
- Your total IRA gifts cannot exceed \$100,000 per year.

Contact your tax advisor to learn more about this tax planning opportunity.

A parting thought

Through the back gate



Gift Giving From the Heart

Can you name one holiday gift you received last year?

If you are like most, it might stump you for a while. Often times the gifts we do remember are those that are something special; gifts someone made for us or gave in our honor, like a charitable donation.

It's really quite amazing when you think about it. We scramble from the day after Thanksgiving (Black Friday) to some time in late December to purchase a bunch of stuff for people who may not even remember what we gave them. I don't want to be a downer, but that's a lot of stress, money and running-around for a forgotten memory.

My point in raising the issue is not to discourage you from buying gifts this holiday season. Rather it's to step back and think about the things you do buy (or make) for people and how your values and their interests are reflected in those decisions. Gift-giving should be joyful, not obligatory, but that's often what happens because we don't plan ahead and really think it through.

My friend Shelly takes great joy in buying gifts for people. Whether it's a close family member or a friend, she is extremely thoughtful about the whole process. She starts early in

the year by planning ahead and making note of the following: who she is buying for, what their interests are, how the gift might add joy to their life and where she might buy the gift (she loves antique shows and thrift stores because they fit with her reuse and recycle mentality). She also sets a strict not-to-exceed budget and never, ever goes into debt to buy gifts. And unlike most of us, she completes her gift purchasing well ahead of the holidays. Suffice it to say last-minute impulse shopping is not in her vocabulary.

Best of all, Shelly derives great joy from giving gifts to others. I know because I've seen her in action. She's as excited about the person opening the gift as the person who's actually opening it. It's really quite amazing. But as I watch her in action it reminds me how truly joyful gift-giving can be. And let me tell you, people remember Shelly's gifts.

A wise person once said,

“Bad habits are developed when times are good and good habits are developed when times are bad.”

Given all that is happening in the economy these days, it's a great time for all of us to re-think our gift-giving habits to see if they pass the “Shelly test.”

-Nathan Dungan
Founder and CEO,
Share, Save, Spend