



DISTRICT NEWS

NORTH DAKOTA

He first loved us

So what could, should or would I write about for February? Bear with me as I think out loud.

Let's see, those of you in the one-year lectionary will celebrate the Transfiguration of Our Lord this month; and those in the three-year lectionary will celebrate the Transfiguration of Our Lord next month. Therefore, I will skip that topic. (I may have stirred your mind as to what I am talking about with these lectionaries. If I have, please talk to your pastor to explain it. Or stay tuned for another article in which I may write about it.)

Another thing that I could, should or would write about that happens in February is Valentine's Day. Now it may be considered to be a civil holiday and is generally focused on our love for those closest to us. But I think I will go with that.

To stimulate this thought on Valentine's Day, let me start by asking the age-old question: Which came first, the chicken or the egg? This seems to be a major philosophical question to many. Since God created the animals in His six-day creation, I'd say the chicken.

How about this one: Which came first,



Rev. Arie Bertsch
District President

God's love for us or our love for God? Take your time. Think about it. Don't answer too quickly.

There are a lot of people out there who say you have to decide to follow Jesus. They say that you have to come to a point in your life when you accept Jesus into your heart. This would mean that our love for God comes first, wouldn't it?

But then again, there are some that say "there's a little good in everyone, and at a certain time in someone's life they begin believing in and following Jesus." This would mean that our love for God comes first, wouldn't it?

Or how about this one! (Be careful, this one's a little trickier.) Some say God comes down to meet us half way, but until we have the urge or desire to grasp His hand, we are not saved. Even if we have some part in God loving us, could this be interpreted that our love for God comes first?

Well, none of the above is what the Bible says. As a matter of fact, the Bible is very clear:

"We love because He first loved us."
— 1 JOHN 4:19

Let's go back to our worship services when we confess that we are poor, miserable sinners. In that statement, we are confessing that there is no life, no good



and no love in us at all! The catechism is correct — we are dead! Blind! And enemies of God!

Not only do we not love God, we don't want to love God. Our sinful nature is continually and persistently rebellious against God, and that puts us in an awful spot. No one is exempt. We confess in the meaning of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed:

"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

But don't fret. God does love us. God loves you. His love is sacrificial. His love is not a

See **MESSAGE**, Page 4

Celebrating CHRIST'S BIRTH at the Ranch

The celebration of Christ's birth is a significant event at **Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch** — one of many significant events. We have tree lightings, Christmas parties, variety shows, lots of gifts for our kids (donated by community members) and more. We try to make Christmas a special time for our precious children — some who have never celebrated Christmas before — and to share with them the beautiful Christmas story.

Our candle-lighting ceremony has become a favorite tradition on all three of our campuses over the past few years. It's a beautiful service as we listen to the story of Jesus' birth, sing hymns, pass the light from candle to candle, and sing "Silent Night." Everyone remains silent as we are ushered out the



doors, marveling at the momentous occasion of Jesus coming into the world.

Christmas is a difficult time for Ranch kids, many of whom are unable to spend it with their families. Ranch staff, local congregations and the community come together in a big way to show them the love and care of Jesus.

Thank you for your prayers and your support of Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch.

Tammy Noteboom
Vice President, Communications
Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch
▶ t.noteboom@dakotaranch.org
▶ dakotaranch.org

Sign up for newsletter



If you are interested in receiving a periodical newsletter about the mission work in Watford City and western North Dakota, contact Rev. Zelwyn Heide at pastor@badlandslutheran.org and you will be added to the list.

Pastor Heide serves Redeemer, Grassy Butte; St. Peter, Belfield; and St. Philip, Watford City. For more information, visit badlandslutheran.org.

Thank you!

A huge thank you to everyone who has supported **Shepherd's Hill at the Crossroads** this past year, especially in response to our end-of-the-year letter request. Your support in prayer, words of encouragement and financial gifts make it possible to continue the work here at Shepherd's Hill. Again ... thank you!

If you are interested in a winter or spring retreat for yourself, your family or church or youth group, contact us now! Weekends during the winter months are filling up. Please visit our Facebook page (facebook.com/shretreat) and website (SHRetreat.org) for information on the events and retreats on our calendar. Summer registration, including online, will be coming soon.

While our end-of-the-year letter has generated significant funds, the winter and spring months are slow times for donations at any non-profit organization. Please consider your Thrivent Choice dollars designation. If you do any online shopping through Amazon, try AmazonSmile (Smile.Amazon.com), which provides an opportunity to donate a small percentage of all transactions to eligible non-profits, including Shepherd's Hill at the Crossroads.

Questions? Contact me at director@shretreat.org.

Jon Bonine
Executive Director,
Shepherd's Hill at the Crossroads



Send submissions for the district supplement to **Marie Johnson** at news@nodaklcms.org



Love for neighbor on Thanksgiving

Three district congregations opened their doors for community Thanksgiving Day dinners.

- ▶ Top two photos: St. Matthew, Hazen
- ▶ Bottom three photos: Concordia, Jamestown

Immanuel, Fargo; St. Matthew, Hazen; and Concordia, Jamestown welcomed people of all ages who were able to enjoy a Thanksgiving meal with members of the congregation and community.

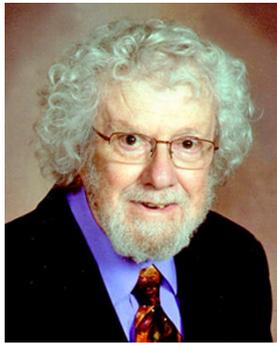
Glory be to God that our congregations can share food and fellowship with those that may not have family nearby or were otherwise unable to visit family and friends on Thanksgiving.



IN MEMORIAM

Rev. Roger Leonhardt 1939-2019

Rev. Roger Leonhardt, a longtime resident of Devils Lake, died early Monday morning, Jan. 7, at Bethany Homes on University, surrounded by his loving family. Roger was 79 years old.



Roger Jerry Leonhardt was born on Aug. 1, 1939, to Oscar and Louise (Hofsass) Leonhardt in Providence, R.I., the younger of two sons. Roger grew up and attended elementary school and high school in Warwick, just outside of Providence. After graduating from high school, he began his studies to become a pastor in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

In September 1957, he began his theological studies at Concordia College—Bronxville, N.Y., where he met his future wife, Sonja Vorbeck, of New York, N.Y. He graduated from Concordia Senior College in Fort Wayne, Ind. In the fall of 1961, Roger enrolled at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, to begin the last four years of theological studies. He graduated in 1965.

On June 22, 1963, he married Sonja at Immanuel Lutheran Church in New York. They moved to Winnipeg,

Manitoba, Canada, for his vicarage, working with a deaf congregation. Their son, Tad, was born in 1964. Roger was ordained on June 6, 1965, at his home congregation, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Providence, R.I. A few days later, their daughter, Lorinda, was born.

Shortly after his ordination, the family of four took off from Rhode Island for their first parish assignment in Devils Lake, where Roger was a pastor of 12 North Dakota and western Minnesota preaching stations, serving deaf congregations; and was chaplain at the North Dakota School for the Deaf (NDS) for the next 17 years. During this time Roger became the first, and at the time, the only certified interpreter for the deaf in North Dakota.

In 1981, Roger continued serving the students at NDS and the deaf congregation in Devils Lake, and became

the pastor of a dual-parish: St. Peter's, Devils Lake, and Grace, Lakota, until he retired in 2001.

Roger was always a hands-on dad and grandpa. He loved spending time with his wife and family, traveling to the east coast, and around North Dakota in their motorhome. His love for the Lord, his wife Sonja, and their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren was always first and foremost in his life. This love and devotion was apparent to everyone who knew him. He touched the lives of countless children and adults of the deaf community throughout his ministry and throughout his life. Rev. Leonhardt celebrated the 50th anniversary of his ordination on June 6, 2015. He lived his life as a good and faithful servant.

Roger is survived by Sonja, his wife of 55 years, of Fargo; his son and daughter-in-law, Tad and Kris Leonhardt of Sioux Falls, S.D., and their six children and families; and his daughter and son-in-law, Mitch and Lorinda Semanko, of Fargo, and their five children and families.

Roger's family would like to thank the nurses and the entire staff at Bethany Homes on University for their loving care of Roger.

Online memories and condolences may be shared at hansonrunsvold.com.

MESSAGE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Valentine's heart-shaped box full of chocolates. His love is that His heart stopped beating in His own death in order to give us eternal life with Him. His love is not a Valentine's card sent from heaven, but God Himself coming to earth to take our place as sinners in order to make us perfect and righteous in God's sight. His love is not a Valentine's romantic dinner for two with wine and flowers. His love is the giving of His flesh and blood in the Lord's Supper, where He feeds us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

God really does love us! And He loved us first!

As God's Word enters our ears and His meal enters our mouths, love now lives in us because God is love. Now, if love lives in us, love lives through us. This love is lived out toward our neighbor. This love is lived out toward our boyfriend or girlfriend, our fiancé, husband or wife. For that matter, our love is lived out toward everyone whom we see and with whom we interact. Therefore, Christians love because God loved us first.

May you hear more about this love as we enter the season of Lent. Have a blessed month — and Valentine's Day — in God's Love!

**Your servant in Christ,
Rev. Bertsch**

