
First Evangelical Lutheran Church
Houston, Texas

December, 2018
Volume 167, Number 12

It's Advent, and the Christmas Season Is Almost Here!

May God bless our worship life as we prepare for the birth of Christ and his coming again.

We will decorate the **Christmas Tree** after the morning worship service on Sunday, December 23 (which is the fourth Sunday of Advent). The Christmas tree, wreaths, more will be put in place for the Christmas season; please stay to help if you can. Lunch will be pizza!

The **Christmas Eve service** will be held at **6:00 pm**. All are invited afterward for our annual gathering around wassail and cookies.

In addition to our own Christmas activities this season, we will again host the **St. Lucia celebration** of the Swedish Club of Houston and the Houston Saengerbund's German Christmas concert. The St. Lucia celebration, which includes a procession, songs and dance, and reception, will be held Saturday, December 15, 4:00 pm (more at www.swedishclub.org). The Saengerbund's Christmas concert and sing-along will be held Tuesday, December 4, 7:30 pm (www.houstonsaengerbund.org). Both events are free of charge.

On Sunday, December 8, 4:00 pm, First Friends and First Lutheran will co-host a Christmas "**Ladies Craft Night.**" \$25 provides wine and cheese and all materials needed for making a custom Christmas wreath.

Part One of the Annual Meeting to Be Held Sunday, December 2

On Sunday, December 2, at 12:30 p.m., First Lutheran will hold Part One of our annual meeting. The annual meeting is divided into two parts. The congregation will vote on proposed nominees for Congregation Council, nominations from the floor will also be accepted.



A Tale of Two Maxims

Which wins out: “Some things should never change” or “Adapt or die”?

McClanahan’s Minute

Every week, while leading a historic liturgical service, I feel the judgment of the world against what we are doing. It is surely just my own insecurities; and yet, I feel like I see it on visitor’s faces. Visitors are utterly confused about both the order of the service and the strangeness of it all, given the weird clothing that the worship leaders are wearing, the lighting of candles, and the employment of an organ, something they may have never even heard before.

I know that since “contemporary” worship has become the norm – deviate from it at your own peril! – liturgical worship that does not bend the knee to emotion and all things “pop” is increasingly out of step with, well, everything that surrounds it. So I am at times tempted to just scrap the vestments, the organ, the hymnal, the paraments...anything that would be a barrier to worshipping God given the aesthetics and philosophy of Millennials.

But there are many reasons I don’t, or really can’t, do that. One is the very basic reason that I would alienate those who have already rejected contemporary worship for liturgical worship. They are convinced that this is a particular reverence and a reality of timelessness that comes with maintaining traditional forms of worship. So losing an existing base, a base that knows how hard it is to find such traditional forms, would be foolish.

I also know that, personally, I would feel like a fraud. As one who is convinced that pulling emotions from people using tried-and-true techniques is nothing less than emotional manipulation, I would honestly far prefer to get a part-time job to support my ministry habit before I led a contemporary service.

But a maxim that strikes me as true is, “some things should never change.” I mean, that is true, right? There are some things, some rituals, some ways of life that should never change, no matter what changes around them...right? In fact, in many ways, “old” things are highly prized. People want to buy old houses. Newly-designed pubs and coffee houses all look old: distressed wooden tables, bench seating, even lightbulbs that look like they just left Edison’s factory. People pay good money to fly around the world to experience old customs or to sit among their ruins. “Old” recipes

have special value. Vinyl records are selling out among audiophiles...because we all know digital sound just isn't true.

God himself instituted worship practices that did not change for centuries. (See Exodus and Leviticus.) So surely, as a premise, it cannot be denied that worship of God need not change. So why should our worship of Him? If liturgical worship is rooted in God's Word, if the sacraments that Jesus instituted remain front and center, and if the words said continue to speak truth, what is the substantial, defensible reason to change?

Of course, the answers are many and they are perhaps rooted another maxim: "Adapt or die." The American economy is a remarkable testament to the power of the ever-changing market. Its complexities and nuances cannot be apprehended by even the most pointy-headed of academics. Businesses, in an effort to sell products or services, adapt to every slight change in the market. They must! For if they do not adapt, their competition will, and they will lose their advantage.

Well, it isn't hard to imagine that when we all get accustomed to constant change and custom-tailoring, something staying the same not only feels stale; it must be positively dead. A cursory look at the contemporary Christian scene will demonstrate that once a congregation goes the route of adapting to stay alive, they are on the train that never stops. Do you remember "contemporary" Christian music in the 1990s? Yeah, it looks nothing like Hillsong. The same ol', same ol' won't cut it, even when you have taken the leap of adding the screens, trap set, electric guitars and flannel. No, you need to adapt or die.

And die many have, and many more will. On the whole, the evidence is in and not even contemporary worship can salvage the poor worship habits, low level of theological knowledge, or weak commitment to the scriptures of rich, distracted, and bored Americans. So while shiny contemporary services are peeling off members from already starving congregations, those churches themselves will have to adapt or die, since innovation is the promise they have made to their members.

So I'm stuck between these two maxims. This is the weekly debate I hold between my ears. Which one will give way to the other? I can't speak for anyone else, but it seems to me that the first maxim remains true and worthy of defending. Adaptation in the marketplace is amazing. But God's Kingdom and life within the Church doesn't have to play by those rules. Shame on our culture for demanding that it do exactly that. Worship of God is certainly in the category of "things that should never change."

December, 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
2 The First Sunday of Advent	3	4 9am-2pm First Friends 7:30 Saengerbund Christmas Concert	5	6 9am-2pm First Friends	7	1 9:00am Oromo Prayer Service 8 9:00am Oromo Prayer Service
9 The Second Sunday of Advent 4:00 Ladies Craft Night	10	11 9am-2pm First Friends 6:30-10:00 Saengerbund rehearsal and fellowship	12	13 9am-2pm First Friends	14	15 4:00 Saint Lucia Celebration
16 The Third Sunday of Advent 12:30 Church Council	17	18 9am-2pm First Friends 6:30-10:00 Saengerbund rehearsal and fellowship	19	20 9am-2pm First Friends	21	22 9:00am Oromo Prayer Service
23 The Fourth Sunday of Advent 12:30 p Christmas Decoration	24 6:00 pm Christmas Eve Service	25 Merry Christmas!	26	27	28	29 9:00am Oromo Prayer Service
30 The First Sunday after Christmas	31	1 Happy New Year! New Year' s Day Party at the McClanahan' s	1	2	3	Sunday Schedule 9:30 am Choir Rehearsal 10:00 am Sunday School 11:00 am FELC Worship in Nave 11:00 am Oromo Church in Great Hall

A Recap of November's Events (By Pastor M.)

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. We had a great crowd at our outdoor movie night on Saturday, November 17. Unfortunately, though we had screened several movies with success, we were beset by technical difficulties. It seems that these fancy new Blu-Ray discs have such sophisticated sound that they don't work with projectors without changing a setting. After about 30 minutes of the movie playing in near silence, we were finally able to get some sound. And now we know a little more about technology. Alas. When we have our next movie night, it will be perfect!

We also hosted two debates in one week in November. I know of very few congregations who host debates at all, much less two in one week! As I've written before, these debates serve as events that promote our congregation and serve as a contribution in the world of Christian theology at large. More than anything, these are YouTube events, as they end up with thousands of views on YouTube and will be seen for years to come. Our first event was more philosophical in nature as Evan Friske and Travis Ross squared off on the origin of morality. I felt Evan did a good job of arguing for morality being rooted in nature while his opponent argued that morality was, in essence, an agreed upon social construction.

You can view that debate here: <https://youtu.be/odfUcgvP7Sc>.

Our second debate featured two nationally-known thinkers, Drs. Joel McDurmon and Richard Carrier. This debate sought to go beyond the typical atheist vs. Christian debate on questions of God's existence and look instead at the expected outcomes of their respected worldviews. In other words, would the world be a better place if we lived by the Christian worldview or the atheist worldview?

Admitting my own significant bias, I felt Dr. McDurmon both honored God with his arguments and did a wonderful job of exposing the weaknesses in Dr. Carrier's positions.



Continued on page 6...

Debate, Continued from page 5...

Like the previous debate, Dr. Carrier offered little of substance as a legitimate starting point. Instead, he relied on the vague promise that science, experience, and reasonable people could create a good world. Dr. McDurmon began with a beautiful illustration of how God allows a man to prioritize his marriage, even over military service, and how this serves as an example of how God loves His bride.

You can view that debate here: youtu.be/uFdo1KIBQKo.

Dinner Club, December 1, 6:00 pm

In case you get this in time, our Dinner Club for December will be Saturday, December 1 at 6:00pm. If you have not attended a Dinner Club yet, please do! A feast of delights awaits you as we have so many wonderful cooks in our congregation. These are also invaluable opportunities for us to grow as a community, and in time, grow in our outreach. The theme is breakfast food at dinner.

Special Thanks...

In the spirit of our observation of Thanksgiving, I (Pastor McClanahan) would like to say thank you to just some of our brothers and sisters in Christ who give their time and talent to our ministries. At the risk of embarrassing them, I name them here!

- Our Altar Guild, who always prepares us for Word and Sacrament ministry: Charlene Kelley, Carolyn Hokanson, Alberta Rogers, Madeline Hortman, and Dede Capps.
- Kristina Neumann who masterfully develops and presents children's sermons. The kids love them!
- Our "Church Ladies" (their preferred title), Charlene Kelley, Carolyn Hokanson, and Raynell Parker for their breakfast goodies, reception setup and cleanup, and much more.
- Damon Capps, Frank Caballero, and others who offer special help on our property projects.
- Our Church council and Executive Committee who spend many hours a week tending to various financial and ministerial needs for the sake of good order. (Lutherans love good order.)
- Our Treasurer Lauren Baird and Financial Secretary Dorothy Hicks for taking on two tasks that not many want to do.
- Everyone who is able to give and support our ministry!

Changes to the Membership Roll in November

Addition of Lisa and Daniel Matz, Rob and Karen Douglass, Sydney Kelley

Membership	Dec. 1, 2018	Nov. 1, 2018	Dec. 1, 2017	Dec. 1, 2016
Child Members	14	14	18	13
Confirmed Members	<u>134</u>	<u>129</u>	<u>141</u>	<u>146</u>
Total Members	148	143	159	159
Associate Members	16	16	16	16
Total Members and Associate Members	164	159	175	175

This and That

- Congratulations to two of our members who will soon have babies! Bridget and Bryan Oliver are expecting a child to be born in April and Daniel and Lisa Matz are looking forward to the same gift at about the same time. Wish both families well when you see them and, of course, keep them in your prayers as they journey into this greatest of joys.
- On Sunday, December 2, at 12:30 p.m., First Lutheran will hold Part One of our Annual Meeting. The congregation will vote on proposed nominees for Congregation Council and nominations from the floor will also be accepted. We will also have a “State of the Church” meeting following, where we will look at our ministries and discuss what we want to prioritize regarding our work and mission. What can we do to grow and on what ministries should we focus?
- On Saturday, December 8 from 4:00-6:00 pm, we will host a ladies craft night. Last year, the craft night was a great success as members of First Lutheran joined First Friends moms to make wooden Christmas signs. This year, Amanda McClanahan will teach the group how to “make and take” Christmas wreaths. Our goal for this event is to foster relationships among First Friends folks and church members. So come out if you can! There will be wine and cheese for snacks as well. There is a \$25 cost and that covers all supplies.
- For the past several years, Pastor McClanahan and Amanda have hosted a New Year’s Day Chili party to ring in the new year. They will do the same this year! Drop on by for some chili, snacks, football and conversation: 4333 Jefferson, 77023.

First Evangelical Lutheran Church

1311 Holman Street at Caroline

Houston, Texas 77004-3833

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Houston's historic First Evangelical Lutheran Church is a congregation of the North American Lutheran Church. Founded in 1851, it played a vital role in the history of Lutheranism in Texas. Located at Holman and Caroline, across from Houston Community College, three blocks east of the 3400 block of South Main, it is convenient to the Ensemble/HCC stop of MetroRail.

713-529-3589 • www.felchouston.org • www.facebook.com/felchouston

The Rev. Evan S. McClanahan, *Pastor*

Dorry Shaddock, *Organist*

Joshua Hortman, *Choir Director*

Carroll Shaddock, Music Director Emeritus

Jane Almquist, *Deaconess*

Gemta Tessema, *Sexton*

Nancy Kincaid, *Office Administrator*