

Dear Saint Paul Lutheran Church,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 1:2)

First things first, I would like to introduce myself and my family. My name is James VanOrman. I am a second career seminary student who moved to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis in June to begin my studies in the Master of Divinity program. Prior to coming to the Seminary, I was a Lab coordinator and term instructor in the Biology Department at Northern Michigan University. My wife, Megan, and I have been married for 10 years and have two daughters: Evangeline (9) and Joy (3). Megan and I grew up in Michigan's Lower Peninsula but lived in Michigan's Upper Peninsula for the past nine years.

Switching careers and moving away from everything that was familiar was definitely daunting. Through it all, God was faithful and provided for us in so many ways. Thank you for being His instrument of provision for us! Your generous gift is such a blessing!

This first semester has flown by. It seems like just last week we were admiring the fall colors and now it is almost Christmas! Advent has only just begun and yet we have already been filled with so much hope and joy at the coming of our Savior. We were blessed to attend the Advent Lessons and Carols service at the Seminary this past week, which was filled with beautiful music from five different choirs. James and Evangeline both enjoyed participating in some of those choirs. The service was a wonderful way to set our focus on what and why we celebrate. The next day our church, Immanuel Lutheran Church in Olivette, welcomed the Advent season with a short, informal hymn-sing before their first midweek service. Lifting our voices together in favorite anthems reminded us of past congregations that we have been blessed to be a part of and really helped us feel more deeply connected with our new church family. At home, our Christmas tree lights cast a warm glow as we share Advent devotions as a family and count down the days until Christmas. So many blessings. In it all, it could not be more clear to us that this is right where God has called us to be. We are so grateful God has made a way for us, through you, to be here.

I would like to keep in contact with you, especially through my studies at the Seminary. Since moving, I have been sending out a brief monthly update to my home congregation and other friends via email. I have included all the monthly updates since we have been at the Seminary so you can catch up with our adventure so far. I would be more than happy to include you in future updates if you so wish. You can email me at [jwvanorman@gmail.com](mailto:jwvanorman@gmail.com) if you are interested in these updates. If not, I will make sure to send you written updates

## **July**

It's been a little over a week since we moved out of our home in the U.P. We were so thankful to have family and friends helping us. The trip down to St. Louis was long, but uneventful. Both kids did great during the drive; Evangeline was thrilled to ride in the big moving truck with James. Once we arrived on campus, we were blown away by the welcome we received. We had expected to spend all day unloading with just Megan's parents to help us, but a big crew of volunteers from the Seminary did most of the work and it was done in about an hour and a half. After that, we ran into Pastor Chad's daughter, Emily (Ott) Kroonblawd, and she was gracious enough to take the girls to the playground while we assembled furniture. Now we just have to unpack all of the boxes and find places to put everything. There are many other families living in the campus apartments and both girls were very quick to make friends. They spend as much time outside with the other kids as they can. This makes it a little easier for James to find time to study. As we write this, he has one whole week of Greek class under his belt. It will be a challenging term, but James is enjoying learning the language while getting to know his peers. This first week has had it's ups and downs as we all adjust to our new surroundings and routines, but God is faithful and continues to provide strength and peace when we need it most. We will leave you with the encouragement James' Greek professor provides before every daily quiz: Jesus is Lord!

## **August**

Greetings from St. Louis! It is hard to believe it has been over a month since we moved. It has been a busy summer so far. James is over halfway done with Summer Greek already! He has been doing well despite the breakneck pace of the class. In between class and studying we have managed to find time for fun. We visited the nearby Zoo around the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Despite the hot weather, the girls had an incredible time. We have also explored the Magic House, a local children's museum. Back on campus, community cookouts have been happening frequently. More families are arriving each week, which has provided the girls with more friends. We are still adjusting to the heat, but the lack of bugs is great!

We've visited a few different churches in the area while we are waiting to hear where James will be placed for his field work. Until then, we have found one that we all enjoy, called Village Lutheran Church.

## **September**

Greetings from the Seminary! James survived Summer Greek! χάρις τῷ θεῷ (Thanks be to God)! Per seminary tradition, James and his peers celebrated by jumping into the fountain that sits in the center of campus. Fall classes started on August 25<sup>th</sup>, so there wasn't much

Earlier in the month Immanuel had a combined English-Chinese worship service for Mission Weekend. Our church has a weekly Chinese service as part of their Light of Christ Lutheran Chinese Mission. On special occasions like this the whole Immanuel family worships together. It was a unique experience to hear God's people worshiping in two different languages simultaneously.

## **December**

Where did the time go? November went by super fast; it is hard to believe that James only has a couple of weeks left in the semester. We kicked off the holiday season already with our church's Craft Bazaar. It was a very festive event and we were able to meet more members of the congregation. James has gotten to chant a couple of times during the liturgy this month. It wasn't as nerve-racking as one would expect, thanks to all the practice we get in chapel each week.

James was blessed to attend the Tell the Next Generation Conference put on by the Missouri District. The theme was Guided by God's Truth and it focused on the church helping families foster discipleship in the home. It was a great day of learning and fellowship.

We are very excited to be planning a visit to the U.P. for Christmas! We're very excited to see family and friends and celebrate the Birth of our Savior with our home church!