

Pastor's Ponderings

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness."

Charles Dickens in Tale of Two Cities

I am struggling this month with the happenings of this time and I am drawn to the dichotomy of the phrase above and how I feel. I am trying to ride the line between anger and peace, and action and basically fatigue. Jesus is quoted as saying in *Matthew 10*, after he sent out the twelve, that there will be hard times, yet in those hard times one should "be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." *Matthew 10:16*

Members of Augustana and TOL have been exhibiting the best of times and have been doves this past month. A member of Augustana, Patrick, was picked up by ICE and detained at the Batavia facility. Over a dozen people have visited him there every day, except one, since December 21.

Praise the Lord.

Patrick, for his part, came into the country on a visa and while on that visa filed for asylum. This is a legal thing to do and it is also a moral thing for USA to allow. Jesus said, "Welcome the stranger."

Since entering, he has had a job and cared for a sister and wants the best for his family.

I am seeing the worst of times, the foolishness of this age and our need to be wise. People whose lives will be in danger in their home country are being treated as less than human here in the United States. Patrick is in a facility where one can visit only if he puts you on the list for that day. When one visits, one talks through glass as if he was a convict. He has to order and pay for clothes since he was picked up outside his home in his sweats and bare feet and he was not allowed to get his papers or clothing. He slept on a mattress on the floor for three weeks. He is now locked in a cell and let out only to eat and maybe a break. Patrick is just a small example of the worst of times happening. So I am trying to be wise.

Yet, he has hope. Two weeks into his incarceration, Patrick noticed that people could not get sacred texts in their native languages, and he asked us to start a ministry to provide texts to the detention facility. He believes in God and hopes for the best of times, despite the fact he may be sent back to be tortured again and possibly killed.

Continue with me to pray for the least of these, and for Patrick. As Jesus said in the story where the king separates the sheep from the goats in *Matthew 25*, "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." *Verses 35, 40*

Praying for the best of times, I remain,
Pastor Fred Kopp

2026 Mid-Week Lenten Soup Suppers and Worship Services Soup Supper at 6:00 PM -- Worship at 6:30 PM

- Feb. 25: Abiding Savior (1534 Ruie Road, North Tonawanda)
- Mar. 4: Good Shepherd (2669 Sheridan Drive, Tonawanda)
- Mar. 11: Augustana (3143 Eggert Road, Tonawanda)
- Mar. 18: St. Martins (322 Old Falls Blvd., North Tonawanda)
- Mar. 25: TOL

2026 Church Council Officers:

- Lanny: President
- Sharon: Vice-President
- Jenna: Recording Secretary (back-ups are Dan and Frank)
- Nancy: Treasurer
- Barb: Corresponding Secretary

**Note: Annual Reports are due in the office by
Sunday, February 22.**

"Souper Bowl" Sunday – A Yearly TOL Tradition! Sunday, February 8

Once again, we have an opportunity to share with the hungry in our community through our support of the food pantries at Good Shepherd Lutheran and the Community of Good Neighbors. Monetary donations can be placed in the soup pot in the narthex and your non-perishable items in the narthex shopping cart. Thank you!



New Presiding Bishop of the ELCA

The Reverend Yehiel Curry was elected to a six-year term as Presiding Bishop of the ELCA on July 30, 2025. He had previously served as pastor for congregations in Illinois and as bishop of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod in 2019.

"Every function of the Office of the Presiding Bishop serves to support and guide members of this church as we wonder, discover and boldly participate in what God is up to in the world."

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"When I was installed as your presiding bishop, the preacher proclaimed that in times of division, disruption and fear, God calls us, through love, to lift up one another just as Christ lifts us up. I have taken that to heart and been alert to all the ways in which we, made into God's own beloved through word and sacrament, testify to that love in daily service and ministry."

[from: *Bishop Curry's statement, November 12, 2025, www.ELCA.org.*]

Trinity Tidings, February 2026

We invite you to join us for worship with Holy Communion, Sundays at 11:00 AM. (in-church or on Zoom)



Ash Wednesday Services/Ashes, February 18

Augustana:	11:00 AM
Abiding Savior:	11:00 AM
Good Shepherd Ashes to Go:	11:00 AM to 1:00 PM
TOL:	7:00 PM
St. Martins:	7:00 PM

ELCA Prayer Ventures, February 2026*

- † **Ash Wednesday** Today is the first day of Lent. Ask the Spirit to help you reflect on your faith as a follower of Christ who – with imperfection – values and practices sacrifice, witness, service, generosity and spiritual growth.
- † Pray for nations experiencing violence and war, including Venezuela, Ukraine and Russia, the Middle East, South Sudan and others. Ask God to guide leaders, diplomats and peacemakers as they seek lasting solutions and peace. Pray for the Spirit to inspire us to be advocates and bearers of peace, hope and justice in our communities and the world.
- † Give thanks for your synod staff who help equip, support and encourage congregations and leaders to share the good news of Jesus Christ, serve neighbors in need and do God’s work in the world.
- † Ask the Spirit to help us refrain from complacency and silence in response to our neighbors who experience daily challenges and injustice, especially among immigrants and refugees, people experiencing poverty, unsheltered neighbors, the elderly, those who are incarcerated and others. Pray that our response to neighbors in need reflects the compassion, respect and justice that Jesus demonstrated throughout his ministry and implored us to follow.
- † Remember in prayer the ELCA AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrants with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities) strategy and the volunteers, advocates, congregations and synods that strive to protect and accompany vulnerable migrant children and their families who seek safe and welcoming places to reestablish their lives.
- † Gun violence continues to afflict our society. In 2025, there were 38,741 deaths related to gun violence and 408 mass shootings (gunviolencearchive.org). Ask God to give us the strength to be diligent in our work and advocacy to end such violence and care for those who suffer grief and trauma due to gun violence and accidental shootings.

Trinity Tidings

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www.trinityoldlutheran.com



Mission for February: Hearts & Hands—Faith in Action

TOL is a part of the Hearts and Hands (H&H) community of volunteers—Neighbor Helping Neighbor. H&H has been serving caregivers and care receivers in Erie and Eastern Niagara Counties since 2003. Please place your donations in the marked envelopes in the narthex; mail donations to the church office (indicate on your check that it is designated for “H&H”).

H&H Mission

“Hearts and Hands connects caring volunteers with older adults by providing transportation, in-home supports, and caregiver respite to uphold their dignity, improve their quality of life, and enhance their ability to live in their home of choice and to assist their primary caregivers.”

[from: <https://hnhcares.org>. Copyright ©2025 Hearts & Hands. All rights reserved.]

For more detailed information, please visit the website or contact the agency at (716-406-8311).

Mission for January: Thank You!

Thank you for your donations in support of ELCA Disaster Response (LDR) as it continues to assist all who are recovering or rebuilding in the aftermath of a disaster. Your donations will be designated to be used wherever it is needed most.

Support for Local Food Pantries

Your donations to assist the Community of Good Neighbors Mobile Food Pantry in Buffalo and Good Shepherd Lutheran’s pantry in Tonawanda are greatly appreciated. Please place items in the narthex shopping cart or leave them in the elevator entrance during the week (Tues./Thurs./Fri. 9:00 AM to Noon). Thank you!



Prayer for Trinity Old Lutheran, Augustana and Good Shepherd Lutheran Churches

Inspire us to be good stewards of the resources you have entrusted to us. Teach us to give freely of ourselves and to offer our lives in service. Show us your will for the ministries at Trinity Old Lutheran, Augustana and Good Shepherd. Strengthen our relationships in this community as we serve our neighbors in love.

My Musings by Diane Schmidtke

Reflection

I am sitting alone on the couch in the living room on this last day of 2025 looking out the window at gently falling snow. I wonder whether it will accumulate the 6-12 inches predicted.

Across the room staring at me is a wonderful Christmas gift from the “kids” and grandkids: a digital frame with ever-changing photos of our lives. Oh! See the beautiful faces shining and sparking such memories!

Sometimes I look away for a moment to check the snowfall, and when I return to the photos I see my face reflected in a grandchild or I see one daughter when it really is another daughter. Is this genetics, DNA, heritage, history, or the mystery of time passing and passed – or is it past?

In the background, “Alexa” is providing music from my favorite Pandora station.

I just requested “Angel Flying Too Close to the Ground” sung by Lukas Nelson. There is a quietness, a gentleness, a peace to all of this...

In my hand is a re-discovered book. It was given to our daughter, Heidi, by a fellow student at Canisius College when she was 20. She was auditing Charlie’s class, “Time and the Human Condition.” Brian wanted to bring her some cheer with his favorite book, Story People, to make her feel less alone in her cancer battle. Today it is bringing me some cheer. Now, 24 years later, my heartstrings are being tugged, but I also can feel her hug and hear her voice.

As a new year stares me in the face, I hold onto the hope that goodness, kindness and love will prevail...

...and the gentle snow keeps falling...


Kindness

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Adult Ed. Classes with Charlie Schmidtke

Join the class on Monday afternoons in the Fireside Room (or on Zoom) from **1:00 PM to 2:30 PM**. Please contact Charlie for a Zoom link. The updated class schedule is below.



February 2:	Letters, Acts and Revelation of Peter
February 16:	Rome - Peter and Paul
March 2:	Corinth - Letters
March 16:	Ephesus - Paul
March 30:	Alexandria and Byzantium

Dirty Rotten Scoundrels – Sign Up for Tickets!

Please join us for a live performance of *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* at **7:30 PM on Saturday, May 2, 2026**. This is a Niagara Regional Theatre Guild presentation at the Ellicott Creek Playhouse (550 Ellicott Creek Road, Tonawanda). Tickets are \$18 each. Please sign up on the main bulletin board or reach out to us. We have reserved 30 tickets.



This high-spirited, hysterical musical tells the story of a Roman slave who wants to win his freedom at any cost. His antics lead to outrageous schemes and mistaken identities, and will keep you laughing all night! The hilarious twists and turns are complimented by a classic Stephen Sondheim score.

Stephanie & Pete

Hope & Healing: Christian Cancer Support

For anyone on a cancer journey, Linda Sokoly (Ministry Leader) from Augustana LC is available to give support through emails, phone calls, texts or one-to-one in person conversations or prayer. Linda can be reached through the Augustana church email at augustchurch@yahoo.com or by calling the Augustana church office at 716-832-5720.



The Support Group for Grieving Parents of children and grandchildren who have died meets on the **1st Tuesday** each month in the Fireside Room (**10:00 AM to 11:30 AM**) and also on Zoom. Coordinators are: Charlie, Diane and Jean.

Thank You Received from Harvest House

Pastor Fred recently received a thank you letter from Joe Semma. [Excerpts follow and the full letter is posted on the main bulletin board.]

Dear Pastor Kopp:

You were part of a community-wide effort! This year’s program included a wide array of groups consisting of faith groups, high schools, social groups and businesses. We were blessed to have over 45 organizations participate. Your assistance is an example of the power of how diversified groups can come together and help our community.

We deeply appreciate your commitment to compassion, dignity, and community solidarity. Your support strengthens our mission and allows us to continue serving the most vulnerable with hope and kindness.

Pastor, thank you again for your participation. Trinity Old Lutheran is one of the original five churches that took part in this project. Without your help, we would never have succeeded in the first year and grown to our current level. Because of you, we can now help almost 4,000 children over the next year. You are God’s word in action!

Joe Semma
Chairperson

3rd Annual Harvest House Baby Shower

Operation Christmas Child

The suggested donations for February are reusable plastic cups/water bottles. Any and all donations are greatly appreciated. They can be placed in the marked box located in the hallway.



Update: Please disregard the suggested donation of soap listed for May. We are not allowed to pack soap in our boxes as of last year.

Although our basket raffle that supports Operation Christmas Child is many months away, we are always in need of any type of basket. Those used and in good condition are always welcome!

ELCA Prayer Ventures, January 2026*

† *Martin Luther King Jr. Day* Give praise and thanks to God for courageous saints of the past and present who help bring about change. Pray that we value one another as children of God and that we are persistent in confronting racism, injustice and inequity.

Adult Ed. Classes with Charlie Schmidtke
Study Notes: "Bible Canon"

Part I: Overview of the Bible

The idea that there is one Bible is a misnomer. Calling it "The Bible" misses the fundamental problems of translations and which books are to be included in your bible. Let's start with the Old Testament (OT).

The Old Testament is based on the Hebrew Bible which is the canonical collection of Hebrew Scriptures. (Canon means approved books.) There has never been universal acceptance of which works should be included in the bible by Christians. However, there is a general agreement among Jews regarding the books they included in their Hebrew Canon, which was developed from 350 BCE to about 150 CE. Jews break their scriptures into three parts—Tanakh: Ta = Torah, Na = Prophets, Kh = Writings.

After the time of the Prophets (circa 4th century BCE) until about 70 CE, there was a Great Assembly consisting of 120 Rabbis who had two primary functions. First, they helped lead the Jews back to a rededication of themselves to the Torah and following the Mosaic Code (the 10 commandments and the laws in Leviticus). Second, they canonized the Tanakh, meaning they established what works were to be included in their sacred writings.

The Ta - Torah consists of the first five books in our OT. The first version of the Torah appeared around 1000 BCE around the time of David's reign. It was allegedly written by Moses, but this isn't true (since he lived centuries earlier). There were two other versions written over the next three centuries. From 586-539 BCE, the leaders and scribes of Judea were exiled during the Babylonian Captivity after the destruction of the temple and plundering of Jerusalem. The Jewish leadership decided that they had failed God and He was punishing them for not following His laws and obeying His commands. They edited and rewrote the Torah; this was the fourth and final version. This Torah emphasized: (1) Abraham and the importance of circumcision; (2) Moses and the necessity to identify themselves with the Laws God had given to His chosen people; (3) The centrality of the Torah in each person's life; (4) The importance of keeping the Sabbath and the rules and laws associated with this practice and (5) Monotheism. There is a mistaken belief that the Jews from the time of Abraham were consistently Monotheistic.

Monotheism as a core belief comes out of the Babylonian Captivity. We can read in Chronicles, in Judges and in Kings that the Israelites and Judeans were consistently having problems with following one God. Maybe the clearest example starts with the Jews at Mount Sinai when Aaron, Moses' brother, helps build a golden calf to Baal. The Jews during the captivity wanted to appease an angry God and realized that monotheism must be a central belief if they are to have any hope of God protecting them.

The last translation and edition of the Torah was read by the Prophet Ezra at the new temple built after the Captivity. This version of the Torah is the one considered the proper version (although Ethiopian and Samaritan Jews do not use this version). Another complicating factor is that language evolves over the centuries; that is true of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Aramaic and English. So, the language used in the last edition of the Torah would have been different in some ways than the language of the first edition. We can see this in our bibles, for example, any modern translation and the King James Version.

The Na - Prophets - and Kh - Writings are consistent in the closed Hebrew Canon, but are not necessarily contained in Christian bibles. Let's look at the issue of translations because it impacts which books are included in Christian bibles.

The books of the bible were written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, for the most part. In the 3rd century BCE, the Greek King of Egypt commissioned 72 Jewish scholars to translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek so it could be included in the Library of Alexandria. It was called the Septuagint. By 132 BCE the translation was completed. So, the OT books became a Greek translation of the original works. However, there are some books in the Septuagint that did not end up in the closed Hebrew Canon. (The closed canon means that no changes are to be made to the books included, while an open canon means that books may be added or deleted.) Another complication for us is that there are Old Testament Books in the Catholic Bible that are not in Protestant Bibles: (typically) The Book of Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, First and Second Book of Maccabees, Tobit, Judith and Baruch, Parts of Ruth, Esther and Daniel.

There is also the Book of Jubilees that was popular around the time of Jesus and up through the first few centuries of the Christian church. It was written in 150 BCE and tells the story of Moses hearing a secret version of the history of Judaism. It was written to answer the question of where did the wives come from for Adam and Eve's nine sons and husbands for their three daughters. It was important to establish that humanity wasn't begun incestuously. Another popular book at the time was the Book of Enoch. Enoch was given a tour of heaven and hell by the angel Uriel. It contains five volumes and 108 chapters. It was finally excluded from the canon.

Also complicating the picture is that we all have different editions or translations. If you read the introduction to your bible, you should get: (1) an explanation of who was involved; (2) what translations or texts they used in writing their translations and (3) what was their purpose in writing the translation. If you read your intros, you will get a different set of reasons and purposes. Thus, different phrases, idioms and words are used in different translations, sometimes shifting the meaning of the passage or sometimes just giving a different nuance.

In addition to the translation issues there are the decisions made regarding which books are in the canon and which books are Apocryphal or unacceptable. Apocrypha are works of unknown authorship or of doubtful origin. Different Christian denominations disagree about what is truly biblical canonicity. The word, apocrypha, is literally translated as "hidden." Writings were called apocryphal originally because the meaning was to be kept secret either because the work was too profound for the common person or too sacred to be shared with the uninitiated. Later writings were called apocryphal because their value to the church was considered questionable. Finally, apocrypha came to mean false, spurious, bad or heretical writings.

Luther's Bible was the first major edition to have a separate section called the Apocrypha. Not all translations in English include the Apocrypha.

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♥ Happy Valentines Day ♥