

Pastor's Ponderings

"Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect." 1 Peter 3:15-16

I have just completed a defensive driving course to get my discount on our insurance cost. Since then, I have been more careful about my driving and more aware of other drivers. While driving into work, when safe, I have been trying to take an informal poll of other drivers. I have counted the distracted drivers as compared to the ones I observe to be driving without distractions. I have done this a handful of times driving to and from work. The percentage of distractive drivers according to my informal poll has been about 33%, or one-third of the drivers have been distracted. WOW.

Now I can't do a poll of Christians who are distracted, but my guess it is all of us, some of the time. We go about life not engaging our faith as we interact with and observe the world. We may think that faith belongs in prayers of grace at the kitchen table or before bed, and in our supportive actions we take at church. Faith, otherwise, does not interfere with the time we spend on devices, the money we spend on ourselves, or the stuff we ignore or don't see as we drive by or channel surf. Our faith is on the back burner when it doesn't impact the decisions we make, the thoughts we think, or the words we say.

The above quote from 1st Peter were verses I thought about a lot during the candidacy process of becoming a pastor, but since that time only occasionally. However, in light of my new-found carefulness in driving, I am trying to apply that intentionality to my faith life and this verse is the beginning, to helping me be ready, aware and able to defend and share the faith that I have. If I am observed by other Christians in their informal polls, I hope I am seen as defending my faith through actions I take to help the least of these or using words I say in public and private that uplifts my fellow human beings.

To be ready to defend one's faith is to be aware that our faith impacts every aspect of our lives. I pray that your driving is defensive and that you are able to be kind and respectful when defending your faith in words and deeds.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Fred he/him/his



Bible Study, Coming in September!

Pastor Fred will hold a four-week Bible Study on 1st John at Augustana on **Fridays from 10:00 AM to 11:30 AM**. It will be held on **September 5, 12, and 19**, with the final session on **October 3**. Hope to see you there!

Special Summer Collection!

We continue to collect new socks for Friends of Night People. They are always in need! Please place your donations in the marked laundry basket underneath the table in the hallway mission collection area. Thank you for your help!



ELCA Prayer Ventures, August 2025*

There is no convenient or more suitable time to respond to the suffering of our neighbors. Pray that we will be mindful of those around us — near and far — and promptly respond with respect, kindness, generosity, sustainable solutions and concern for their short- and long-term needs.

Calling all Crafters and Bakers — we need you!

On **Saturday, September 6 from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM**, we will hold our 2nd Annual "Craft Show--Basket Raffle--Baked Goods Sale." A volunteer sign-up sheet is posted on the main bulletin board listing the various tasks.

What's new this year is our own TOL Community Craft Show table. If you would like to donate your completed items to this table, all proceeds will go to TOL. A group gathered on Tuesday evening, July 29, to work on their crafts. But, if you have an idea for one, please share it with us.

Basket Donations: Last year our idea of everyone in our congregation donating one instant lottery ticket helped us fill three picture frames of tickets! If you have a basket (or items for one), or a gift card donation, please see Debbie or Kelly. All donations of time and resources are greatly appreciated! **Deadline for basket donations is Sunday, August 31.**

Baked Goods: We welcome your donations of cookies, breads, pie slices, and brownies for the sale (no cakes, please—they are difficult to cut and plate). They should be delivered to the church **by Friday, September 5 or by 9:00 AM on Saturday**. If possible, please pre-plate or bag your donations. If you have any questions, please speak to Earlene. Thank you!



Worship and Picnic in the Park!

On **Sunday, September 7 at 10:00 AM**, enjoy spending time with families from TOL, Augustana and Good Shepherd at Veteran's Park in the City of Tonawanda (777 Niagara Street, Shelter #2).

There will **not** be a service at TOL that day, so we're hoping everyone will be able to come to the picnic for worship (**10:00 AM**), followed by fellowship, and lunch.

Trinity Tidings, August 2025

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



ELCA Prayer Ventures, August 2025*

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- † Pray for lasting and resilient peace where there is conflict and war in the world, especially in Ukraine, Russia and the Middle East. Pray that we will not grow weary in supporting and caring for those who continue to live in uncertainty and suffering amid violence, injustice and displacement from their homes and communities.
- † Pray for worship leaders and musicians gathering for the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians conference in Raleigh-Durham, N.C., that their passion, creativity and skills for leading music will grow as a means of expressing faith and sharing the gospel.
- † We are church for the sake of the world, celebrating the abundant life that has been promised by God and fulfilled in Christ's life, death and resurrection. Pray for the Spirit to guide and inspire the discussions, decisions and work of the 2025 Churchwide Assembly, that our church will proclaim and exemplify the grace we have in Jesus.
- † Give thanks for those who participated in the Churchwide Assembly and ask God to protect them as they return to their faith communities.
- † Open our hearts and minds to see problems in the world as opportunities to encourage and care for one another, to seek new paths toward justice and peace, and to share the good news of God's mercy and love for humanity.
- † *International Youth Day* Half the people on our planet are age 30 or younger. Pray for every nation to honor the gifts of young people, address the challenges they face and provide easy access to resources that contribute to their physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual and economic well-being.

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.

Support Group for Grieving Parents... This group, for 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 and Diane and Jean.

Trinity Tidings

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Mission for August: ELCA Disaster Response "Flood Response and Recovery in Texas"

The mission for August is ELCA Disaster Response: Texas Flooding. The tragedy occurred in Kerrville (in the Texas Hill Country). The ELCA is coordinating its efforts with the Southwestern Texas Synod and others in response to the needs of those impacted while also assisting with clean-up efforts. The ELCA remains actively involved in the long-term recovery.

Marked envelopes are available in the narthex, or mail your donations to the church office (indicate on your check that it is designated for ELCA Disaster Response: Texas Flooding). Donations can also be made online through [Tithe.ly](https://www.tithe.ly).

Mission for July: Holy Rest Cemetery

Thank you to everyone for your donations in support of the general upkeep at Holy Rest Cemetery. Also, thank you to the group of volunteers who participated in a cemetery workday on Saturday, July 19. (See the related article elsewhere in this issue).

Support for Local Food Pantries

Your donations in support of the Community of Good Neighbors Mobile Food Pantry in Buffalo and Good Shepherd Lutheran's pantry in Tonawanda are greatly appreciated. Suggested items needed are listed below.

Please place your donations in the narthex shopping cart or leave them in the elevator entrance during the week (Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 9:00 AM to Noon). Thank you!

- Canned fruits, vegetables, beans, soup, tuna and chicken
- Peanut butter and jelly
- Cereal and other breakfast items (oatmeal, grits)
- Pasta, Mac-and-Cheese
- Spaghetti and pasta sauces
- Instant potatoes
- Paper products, feminine hygiene products



My Musings
by Diane Schmidtke

Tomato or No Tomato?

"Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad. Philosophy is wondering if that means ketchup is a smoothie."

I love knowledge. I love wisdom. Most of all I love ruminating and wondering... Why? What if?

What if I hadn't entered that bathroom lounge at Buffalo State and met another student who was having lunch there because Moot Hall was too crowded? What if her boyfriend – soon to be fiancé – wasn't a student at Canisius College?

I never would have met Charlie...

- ☺ Or moved to New Orleans
- ☺ Or met our Dutch friends at Tulane U
- ☺ Or given birth to our 4 daughters
- ☺ Or driven all around the US and Canada (43 states and 7 provinces)
- ☺ Or traveled extensively in Europe
- ☺ Or snorkeled in the Gulf of Mexico...

I could go on and on... I might have experienced some of these things along the way, but in different ways with different people: a different me. "The Road Less Traveled," a poem by Robert Frost; "Sliding Doors," a 1998 movie; and "The Midnight Library," a recent novel by Matt Haig—all address this idea of **What If?** Each of these found me at a different period in my life, and each one fascinated me.

So now, while I'm recovering from recent surgery, I have plenty of time to wax poetic and wax philosophical—and to wonder: What *would* a cherry tomato taste like if surrounded by pineapple and watermelon and blueberries?



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Do You Hear What I Hear?

*Did you ever experience a miscommunication?
Do you feel you need to learn how to listen better?
Do you want to discuss what gets in the way of
good communication?
Do you want to share time away with others and enjoy great
fellowship?*

**Join us at the Adult Retreat!
October 3, 4 and 5
Lake Chautauqua Lutheran Center**



This is a time for us to gather again in fellowship, laughter and prayer. The retreat is open to all who are 18+ years of age. Complete retreat information is posted on the main bulletin board, as well as the sign-up sheet. If you worship with us on Zoom, please call or email the church office and we can add your name to the list.

If you have any questions, please contact the church office (716-836-4868) or Charlie.

TOL Men's Group

On Saturday, June 28, they gathered together and enjoyed breakfast food and fellowship. Following that, Charlie Schmidtke showed slides from his trip to Israel—beautiful photos of the places he visited, along with interesting historical perspectives. As only Charlie can do, he brought biblical times and places to life for those of us in attendance.

Thank you, Charlie, for sharing your knowledge with us!

Lanny

Holy Rest Cemetery Clean-Up

Thank you to everyone who generously gave their time and energy to help with the cemetery clean-up on Saturday, July 19! We are especially grateful to the 11 volunteers who braved the heat and worked



diligently for over three hours. From trimming around headstones and clearing debris, to tidying up the garage and even mowing part of the lawn, your efforts made a big difference!

If you are interested in helping at the cemetery or joining the Holy Rest Cemetery Board, please contact Jim or Matt.

Thanks again and God Bless!
The Holy Rest Cemetery Board

Operation Christmas Child

For the summer months, the suggested donations are school supplies. Examples of these items would be blue/black ink pens, pencils, pencil sharpeners, colored pencils, markers, small pocket size notepads, and safety scissors.

All items can be placed in the bin located in the hallway marked Operation Christmas Child.

Thank you for your continued support.
Kelly and Debbie

**Adult Ed. Classes with Charlie Schmidtke
Monday Afternoons, 1:00 PM to 2:30 PM
TOL Fireside Room or on Zoom**



The 2025 class schedule is listed below.
The full schedule will appear in the September Tidings.

2025

September 15	Jerusalem - Peter, John and James (Acts)
September 29	Damascus - Tarsus - Saul Conversion
October 13	Antioch - Barnabas (Acts)
October 27	India - Thomas (Acts of Thomas)
November 10	Armenia - Nathaniel/Bartholemew and Jude/Thaddeus
November 24	Egypt - Coptic Tradition (Philip)
December 8	Infancy Gospels (Thomas and Syriac)

Part III: The Gospel of Thomas

The following provides some information about the Gospel of Thomas that was supposedly written by him, but was really written after his death by his followers, and the Acts of Thomas that was also written by his followers.

Thomas' Gospel

1. Written by disciples (between 60-250 AD) who believed in the Hindu Jesus and Thomas as a leader. It is also referred to as the Coptic Gospel of Thomas—found near Nag Hammadi in 1945 (central Egypt near the Nile). It may have ended up there through the Essenes or when Thomas' followers wanted a safe place away from India to preserve his works from the persecution of the Roman Church. The Coptic Church also accepted much of what was written in the Gospel and may have just stored it with other documents they considered true or valuable.
2. There are books and records about sightings of Jesus in India after his resurrection—we heard some before. There are passages in the Acts saying that Thomas and Jesus were often mistaken for each other.
3. Thomas was probably an Essene and belongs in the Hindu/Essene connection. Be careful about reading the text from a Western tradition—most scholars seem to do so.
4. Thomas stayed in Jerusalem, for maybe eight years, then went to Syria, on to Persia and ended in India. He started in Northwest India, now Pakistan, and moved to the southwest. He was the apostle sent to India and fulfilled the call Jesus' yogi instructors had made. Thomas studied with Jesus who had also gone to India after his resurrection. Thomas would have learned the Dharma and Hindu ways from Jesus and from those who instructed Jesus during his stay in India.
5. There is one story about Thomas being Jesus' twin that is popular with his followers. Thomas received an inner call that Mary, his mother, was dying. Thomas went to Ephesus, arrived three days too late. He went to her tomb and Mary's radiant living body emerged from the stone Sepulcher and ascended (the Catholic Church calls this her Assumption). Thomas cried out imploring her not to leave. She looked upon him with tenderness and took the belt from her waist that she habitually wore and threw it down to him with words of blessing.
6. After his experience with Mary, Thomas went to Qumran and persuaded some Essenes to go to India with him. Many did. In the 20th century excavations in southern India where Thomas died have found coins from Qumran dated to the first century.
7. Thomas was killed sometime around 72 CE (40-45 years after the resurrection). The earth around his tomb was the sight of many miracles. In 1292, Marco Polo visited the site and took some of the red-colored earth. Upon his return to Venice, he healed many people with the earth.
8. In the 16th century, the Portuguese began to convert Thomas' followers to the "True Catholic Church" and later the Pope summoned clergy and laymen who were followers of Thomas and Jesus. He asked them to bring their sacred liturgical and theological texts. The pope surrounded them with soldiers and confiscated all the

material and burned it in front of them. This is a primary reason why there are so many gaps in the history of Thomas' Christianity in India. The books of magic and healing were among the ones burned. An Archbishop from Portugal who was commissioned to "convert the pagans" sent soldiers to go house to house to destroy books in India. He also destroyed the books of astrology used by the priests who followed Thomas and demanded that Thomas' followers stop Hindu practices and conform to Western standards of Christianity. Thus, what was once a thriving Hindu Christian community became dismembered and only a small number of followers remain (from Syria to India). Other denominations of Christianity were introduced when the British ruled India and when missionaries were sent for a variety of reasons (to help or to convert). Today the numbers of Christians in India are: Protestant (18,860,000); Catholic (10,570,000); Orthodox, Thomas' followers (2,370,000); and Other (50,000).

9. In the 19th century, Saint Gregorios helped restore Jesus' Hinduism and Thomas' Christian Church in southern India. The primary beliefs were: (a) belief in karma; (b) belief in reincarnation; and (c) the belief that God and the individual spirit-self are one.
10. Today the traditions of Thomas and Jesus are intact in practices of Dharma and Yoga.
11. Jesus was born a man and became God—this is consistent with Hindu belief and practices.
12. Thomas' Theology is one of Wisdom, not of salvation on the cross. Redemption comes from within, not from the outside—from inner wisdom, not from the crucifixion.
13. Jesus is the inner voice of mystery and the self.
14. The cross was a way to get rid of the body not a way to bring salvation from sin.
15. Thomas was mystical and saw God's kingdom as the sacred place between alpha and omega. His mysticism came from Jesus and his yoga training in India. It was something he learned. Thomas was a transformed messenger of God.
16. His gospel is synchronic, not a narrative like our gospels. It contains the sayings, questions and teachings of Jesus (with no miracles) and connected by their meanings, not chronology or history. Questions may be answered in later sayings, which illustrates the inner meaning and connectedness of truth.
17. Truth can never be found in the material world of space and time.
18. Thomas taught that Jesus was a Hindu yogi, teacher, and the Messiah. But he was calling humanity to awaken to inner reality and truth. His purpose was not to save us from original sin—remember what we talked about with the Essenes and how original sin was not an issue at the time. Thinking that the crucifixion was for salvation from original sin seems to be a misunderstanding of Jesus' purpose on earth. Jesus came to enlighten us to truth, peace, and fulfillment.

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Wishing you a happy and safe summer!