



THE GOOD NEWS

San Marcos
Lutheran Church

August 2026

Our Mission: "To know, accept and live the love of God and share it with others"

August Highlights

Celebration of Life for Grace Holtz

Saturday, August 1, 2026- 12pm

at SMLC (Reception following)

Please join Gene and the family in giving thanks to God for Grace's 89 years of life and the way she blessed so many people with her welcoming spirit, warm smile and giving nature.

Financial Forum

Sunday, August 16

After worship in Luther Hall

Special Congregational Meeting

Sunday, August 23

After worship in Luther Hall

Pr Casey's Outdoor Office Hours

Tuesday, August 25th

5pm-7pm

Draft Republic, San Marcos



SAVE the DATE!

Come join us!

God's Work, Our Hands

Coming Soon...

September 13th

God's Work, Our Hands!

Everyone is welcome to GWOH as we come together for service projects, potluck, and fellowship.

You don't want to miss this opportunity to show God's Love in action and have a good time!

A discerning mind gains knowledge, and the ears of the wise eagerly seek it. – Proverbs 18:15

In high school, college, and most of seminary, I drove a 2001 Honda Accord. The back was absolutely covered with bumper stickers. These stickers professed a wide variety of truths about myself. I had one that said “My Heart Belongs to Rico’s Taco Shop” and was shaped like a burrito. This remains true, even though the shop has changed names since then (but is still run by the same family). I had a license plate holder that said “I’d Rather Be at D Street” and I could often be found parked near that beach in Encinitas. I had some political stickers related to who I supported in elections during those years, and I had other assertive statements of belief. One that stands out to me in this moment said, in stark black and white capitals: QUESTION EVERYTHING.

I am naturally skeptical, and have been encouraged throughout my life to learn more about everything that interests me. I have always been a voracious reader, and I love a “fun fact.” In college, as a Religious Studies major at California Lutheran University, I spent a lot of time with my friends who were members of the Secular Student Alliance—a club for people who were atheists, agnostics, or otherwise asking big questions about who God might be and what that might mean for them. We stayed up until the wee hours of the morning debating all sorts of things, as college students are prone to doing.

Being (and remaining!) friends with these folks was one of the highlights of my academic career, as it kept me thinking and growing in my own faith and reason. They jokingly referred to me as the club’s Lutheran Liaison, and I may even have been listed as an officer of the organization by that title at some point. Our mutual respect for one another’s beliefs—even and especially as those beliefs grew and changed with new information and life experience—made our conversations lively and our relationships deep.

What I had most in common with those peers was a hunger for learning more. You probably notice this, as I go off on research rabbit holes that I share with you in my preaching, or because of the book recommendations we exchange at coffee hour, or because of the journeys we have gone on together to find the answers to your questions about the world God loves.

I always want to encourage your questions. I hope you have heard me say this before, but if you haven’t, here it is again. When I preach and teach, it is rarely (if ever) The Last Word on the subject. Each week, I want to open a conversation with you about what scripture has to say to us, and how the Holy Spirit is moving in our congregation and in the world. Many of you ask me questions on your way out the door, or during coffee hour, which I love! If you have a question, please ask it!

We had such a fun time earlier this year with “Things You Missed in Confirmation Class” during Community Time, where I collected your questions for a few weeks, prepared answers, and then walked through those things together. By popular demand, we are doing it again! Keep an eye out for a question box in Luther Hall, and really dig deep with your big questions. At the time of writing this newsletter, the calendar is a bit in flux and so I do not have a save-the-date for you for the day the questions will be answered. But ask away! And I’ll keep you posted.

Your curiosity is a gift from God, and it delights both God and me when you use your mind for wonder!

Peace,
Pastor Casey

San Marcos Lutheran Church

3419 Grand Avenue San Marcos, CA 92078

(760) 727-1509

office@sanmarcoslutheran.org

www.sanmarcoslutheran.org

All are Welcome! As a community of the people of God, the members of San Marcos Lutheran Church welcome all people, regardless of age, economic status, ethnic background, gender, physical or mental ability, race or sexual orientation. We affirm that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female." (Galatians 3:28)

Pastor Casey Kloehn Dunsworth

Office Manager: Aimee Hudlow Musician: Justin Hershey

Bookkeeper: Cristen Mugford Choir Director: Max Chodos

Communications: Adriana Alfaro

Council Members

Dan Norris, President

Ed Mossuto

Kelly Van Jen, Vice Pres.

Devin Hogan

Anne Voth, Secretary

Donna Johnson

Beda Farell, Treasurer

Sharon Phelps

Brother Jack Anderson

Esther Daniels

To contact any Council members, email
council@sanmarcoslutheran.org

San Marcos Lutheran Preschool
preschool@sanmarcoslutheran.org
(760)727-0326

Director: Ann Leong

Teachers: Roxy Maldonado, Marlene
Vazquez, & Elle Kim

**Remember in Prayer:**

Christine Buma, Sue Check, Crystal, Eunice Choi, Celia Genishi, Wanda Giuliano and daughter Tammy, Jolene Hanson, the Holtz family, Pete Johnson, Gary Kloehn, Karin Kloehn, Larry, Deborah McGregor, Maddie, Alvar Roy, Jean Russell, David Russell, Marilynne Smith, Dawn Steele, Stephanie, Marilyn Schwarz, Nick Torres, Kelly Van Jen.

**PLEASE CONTACT US!**

We want to include you in our prayers, arrange for pastoral visits, and inform the congregation, when appropriate. Please notify the Church Office (760)727-1509 when:

- A loved one or someone you know dies
- You, or someone you know is ill or grieving
- You, or someone you know is in the hospital
- You want to plan a baptism, wedding, or celebration
- You moved or contact info has changed.

For urgent needs, contact Pastor Casey at cell:

442-222-1194

Lutheran Fellowship Lunch

Everyone is invited for good food and fellowship with First Lutheran of Vista. We will meet on Monday, August 10th at 12pm at PEGAH's Kitchen at 955 S Santa Fe, in Vista. It will be order from the menu and they have a great selection. Any Questions contact Bill Hanson,

760-805-4565. Hope to see you there!

**Saturdays of Sisterhood**

**We will not meet in August,
but will resume on Sept. 5th**

Saturdays of Sisterhood is a bible study designed by women, for women, about women. It includes fellowship, bible reading, sharing of ideas, prayer, and fun.

No need to RSVP a spot, all women are welcome!

Questions? Contact Karin Kupka

Financial Update

End of June 2026 - 50% of Year

Income

Annual Budget	Actual YTD	% of Budget
\$308,160	\$139,442	45.25%

Expenses

Annual Budget	Actual YTD	% of Budget
\$322,368	\$154,115	47.81%

Thank you for your generous gifts which support the mission and ministry of San Marcos Lutheran Church! Mid-year giving statements have all been mailed out for those that made an initial pledge at the beginning of the year.

Announcements:

We will hold a **Financial Forum, on Aug. 16** in Luther Hall after worship, to discuss the motion for consideration at the Special Congregational Meeting and other financial plans and projects for the congregation. The background, reasoning, and available details will be shared. There will be plenty of time for questions and discussion. Please plan to attend this important forum to get information about the future plans for our congregation.

There will be a **Special Congregational Meeting on Aug. 23** immediately after worship in Luther Hall. The purpose of the meeting is to vote on a motion recommended from the Endowment Committee. The motion will allow principal funds from the Endowment Fund to be transferred to the general operating account of the congregation. Council is in agreement with this motion.

Council Update

Hello SMLC! Here are the updates for the July Council meeting.

The Council did not meet in July for a regular monthly meeting. The Council did review via email a recommendation from the Endowment Committee that will be discussed at the Financial Forum on August 16th, 2026. The council will resume our regular monthly meetings in August.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as president for 2026 and for your continued support of SMLC, our Council, Pastor Casey, and the staff.

Daniel Norris, President

Social Action



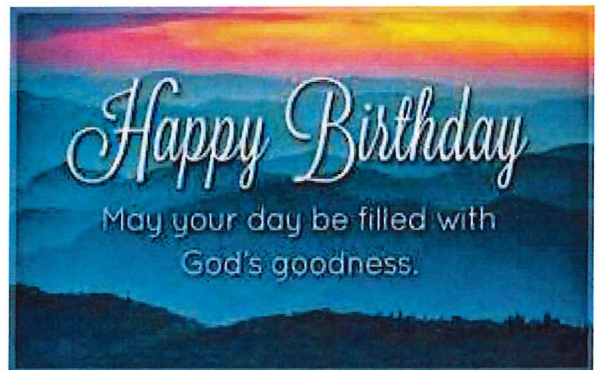
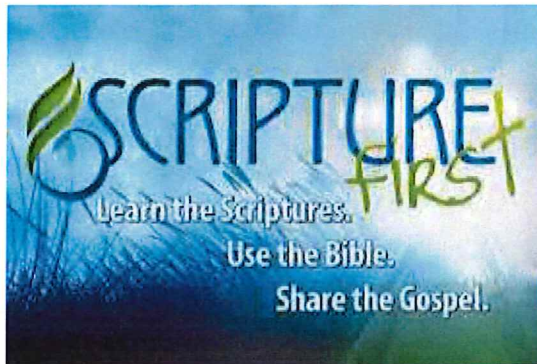
ALL SAINTS FOOD PANTRY

In August, we'd again like to request donations of items we seldom get from the Food Bank. Especially welcomed would be a variety of boxed treats that are individually packaged, such as Nutty Buddies, Twinkies, Ding Dongs, etc. These are opened so we have enough to offer individual packages to all of our clients. Condiments, spices, cake and muffin mixes are always welcome. There were 42 clients on July 25th, representing over 100 family members.

Thanks to all of you who continue to support this ministry. Our numbers have gone up, so your donations are always welcome.

ORGAN FESTIVAL IN BALBOA PARK

For the past several years, we have enjoyed carpooling to a free concert at the Spreckels Organ Pavilion in Balboa Park. This summer we've selected the concert on August 17th, an exciting program with organ and orchestra. If you are interested in attending as a driver or passenger, please contact Doris Payne by text (559-299-0146), phone (760-653-3026), or email (dorispayne3247@gmail.com).



Aug 2 **10th Sunday after Pentecost**
 First Reading: Isa 55:1-5
 Second Reading: Romans 9:1-5
 Gospel: Matt 11:16-19, 25-30

Aug 9 **11th Sunday after Pentecost**
 First Reading: 1 Kings 19:9-18
 Second Reading: Romans 10:5-15
 Gospel: Matt 14:22-33

Aug 16 **12th Sunday after Pentecost**
 First Reading: Isa 56:1, 6-8
 Second Reading: Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32
 Gospel: Matt 15:[10-20] 21-28

Aug 23 **13th Sunday after Pentecost**
 First Reading: Isa 51:1-6
 Second Reading: Romans 12:1-8
 Gospel: Matt 16:13-20

Aug 30 **14th Sunday after Pentecost**
 First Reading: Jer 15:15-21
 Second Reading: Romans 12:9-21
 Gospel: Matt 16:21-28

8/2 Nicholas Angelini
 8/7 Sharon Scott-Gonzalez
 8/7 Dan Weis
 8/10 Alex Murray
 8/10 Eric Webster
 8/13 Jack Carreon
 8/13 Abigail Young
 8/14 JJ Lott Jr.
 8/19 Carter Kepler
 8/23 Shawn Angelini
 8/24 Sharon McEwan
 8/25 Phillip Sheahan
 8/27 Hector Gonzalez
 8/27 Tricia Oliveira
 8/29 Oliver McNichols

**The next Newsletter article deadline
 is August 15th**

2026 AUGUST

CALENDAR YEAR

CALENDAR MONTH

SUNDAY

FIRST DAY OF WEEK

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
26	27	28	29	30	31	01 12pm- Holtz Memorial-SA & LH 6-9pm AA- LH
02 10am- Worship Service 11:15- Community time	03 12pm- AA- LH	04 7-9pm- Music Men- LH	05 12pm- AA- LH	06	07 12pm- AA- LH	08 6-9pm AA- LH
09 10am- Worship Service 11:15- Community time	10 12pm- AA- LH	11 7-9pm- Music Men- LH	12 12pm- AA- LH 130pm- SAC mtg- Conf 6-8pm- AA Leadership Mtg-LH	13	14 12pm- AA- LH	15 6-9pm AA- LH
16 10am- Worship Service 11:15- Financial Forum	17 12pm- AA- LH	18 7-9pm- Music Men- LH	19 12pm- AA- LH 6:30pm- Exec. Council 7pm- Council	20	21 12pm- AA- LH	22 6-9pm AA- LH
23 10am- Worship Service 11:15- Spec. Cong. Mtg	24 12pm- AA- LH	25 7-9pm- Music Men- LH	26 12pm- AA- LH	27	28 12pm- AA- LH	29 6-9pm AA- LH
30 10am- Worship Service 11:15- Community time	31 12pm- AA- LH	01	02	03	04	05

NATIONAL FRIENDSHIP DAY



Invite a friend, neighbor, or loved one
to join us for worship and community time



SUNDAY, AUGUST 2



WORSHIP AT 10AM



SAN MARCOS
LUTHERAN
CHILDREN'S CENTER

You're Invited!

OPEN HOUSE

PLEASE RSVP TO ANN LEONG,
CENTER DIRECTOR

NEW FAMILY TOUR AVAILABLE!



FRIDAY, AUGUST 7TH
9:00 AM—11:00 AM

A warm invitation for currently enrolled
families and future families to explore our
Christ-centered preschool.



DISCOVER
A PLACE
WHERE CHILDREN...



Are known,
loved &
encouraged



Learn through
play, curiosity
& exploration



Grow in faith
through daily
learning & chapel



Build friendships
in a safe/nurturing
environment



Prepare for
kindergarten
& beyond

3419 Grand Ave. San Marcos, CA 92078 • (760) 727-0326 • preschool@sanmarcoslutheran.org

BLESSING OF THE BACKPACKS

A special back-to-school worship service
for children, students, teachers, & families.



**SUNDAY,
AUGUST 30TH**



**BLESSING DURING
BEGINNING OF
WORSHIP**



**BRING YOUR
BACKPACK TO BE
BLESSED**

After the Blessing



**SUNDAY SCHOOL
WITH OUR TEACHERS**

Parents are invited to remain in
worship while children enjoy
Sunday School.



**AMAZING MINI
MIRACLES**

Special guests: miniature
horses will be visiting!



ALL ARE WELCOME!

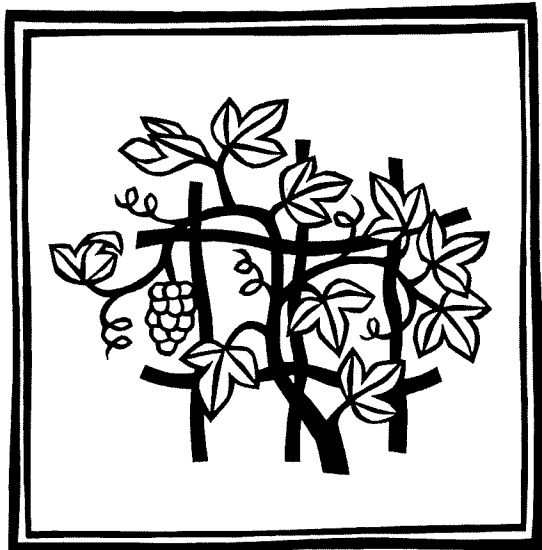
- ♥ Current Preschool Families
- ♥ Future Preschool Families
- ♥ Alumni Families
- ♥ Preschool Teachers (past & present)

Support our Preschool
Ministry Online.



Scan to Donate
or Learn More.





A SUMMER DEVOTION: August

As we move through the summer months and find ourselves in Ordinary Time on the Church calendar, the Sundays may begin to run together. Perhaps you'll be traveling, or have loved ones visiting you, and will not participate in worship as often as you usually do. These weekly devotions, reflecting on selected scripture from the Revised Common Lectionary, are intended to enrich your weeks—whether you attend worship or not.

Each week includes five components: a passage of scripture, a reflection by Pastor Casey, questions for reflection, actions you might take, and a prayer.

For those who do attend worship in person, consider sticking around for Community Time to chat about your answers to the questions or the actions you took that week.



AUGUST 2, 2026 — TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 14:13-21

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled, and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

REFLECTION

The miracles of Jesus are some of the most beloved stories in our scripture, showing us the power of God to transform ordinary moments into something extraordinary. These stories are also some of the most misunderstood.

When we read them, we want to apply the scientific method. We want to investigate. We want to get to the bottom of just how exactly it is possible that Jesus took five loaves of bread and two fish and turned them into enough food for five thousand men and the women and children who were with them.

But that is not how these stories are meant to be understood, because we cannot do that. We cannot replicate the conditions of these miracles in a lab to see how they work. One thing we can do is use what Biblical scholar Wilda Gafney calls our "sanctified imagination" and wonder what it might have been like to be present for them.

Try to put yourself in this moment. You're on the seashore surrounded by other people. It's noisy, it's hot, but the sun is beginning to set. Everyone is gathered there because they need something, and they think Jesus can provide it. What is it that you need? Why are you there? Are you hoping to be healed? As the hour gets later, you realize how hungry you are. The children you're with are hungry, as well. Everyone is hungry, it turns out. But not everyone brought food along, because not everyone knew that they'd be gone so long, and not everyone even had any food at home to bring along.

You can't really see what's happening up front, but you can hear the murmurings that Jesus and his friends are handing around some bread and some fish. Eventually, some comes your way. You and your family eat your fill, and share with the people seated near you. You're exhausted, but you're fed. You begin the long, dusty walk home.

To a hungry person, the good news that Jesus brings is bread. In the kingdom of God, no one goes hungry. There is no more fear or desperation or sacrifice, just full bellies. A miracle, any way you slice it.

QUESTIONS

What do you hunger for? Assuming that your physical hunger is satisfied by adequate nutrition, what are you missing spiritually or socially? What feeds your soul?

ACTION

Feed someone who is hungry. It's that simple!

That can be your household, a friend, a neighbor, or a stranger. Or you can contribute something to the All Saints Food Pantry, or sign up to help serve there on a Saturday morning. Or sign up to

help serve dinner at the Turk Center on a Sunday evening. (Contact the church office for help getting connected with these opportunities.)

PRAYER

God of abundance, thank you for filling us with the bread we need for today. Keep us hungry for your word and for the coming kingdom. Amen.



AUGUST 9, 2026 — ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 14:22-33

Immediately he made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

REFLECTION

You have probably heard it said that "do not be afraid" is one of the most-repeated phrases in all of scripture. This is heartwarming, because we can rest assured that God wants us to live free of fear. But it tells us something about the human condition that, throughout history, the people of God have needed to be told this over and over and over again!

Fear is part of life. It is coded into our brains to keep us safe. But sometimes we are a little too vigilant, and we get caught up in our fear.

In his book *How Not to Be Afraid*, Northern Irish peace worker Gareth Higgins explains that we have a lot to learn from our fear. "Look beneath your fear," he writes, "and you will discover what it is you really care about."

If we fear being alone, that can teach us that we value relationship and connection. If we fear having done something that can't be fixed, that can mean that we care about other people's feelings and futures. If we fear not having enough, we can reframe that into working so that all people have what they need.

Leaning into our fear, letting it overwhelm us and guide our choices, does not lead us closer to God or to each other. Gareth insists that "aggression, shame, and disconnection—even as attempts at making a better life for me or a better world for all of us—don't work. But as we expand our circle of caring to include *all* people, *all* places, *all* of creation, we discover that all our fears are shared and all our cares come from the same place."

When we understand our fear, we can move forward with love.

QUESTIONS

What is it that you fear? How does that fear show up in your body, mind, or spirit? How can you be gentle with yourself when you experience that fear?

ACTION

Try this exercise from *How Not to Be Afraid*, which invites you to step outside any fear of loneliness by befriending the deeper you:

"Sit in a comfortable chair, hands folded, eyes closed. Breathe slowly. Repeat these words out loud:

I am being made by love and for love.

I am being made by love.

I am being made.

I am.

Continue to breathe slowly, not concerning yourself too much with the thoughts that seek to distract. Do this for six minutes at the beginning of the day. Try it for a week. See what happens."

PRAYER

God of comfort, you tell us again and again to not be afraid. Hold us close when we are overcome by fear, and remind us to never fear that you are far from us. Amen.



AUGUST 16, 2026—TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Psalm 133

How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down over the collar of his robes.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the Lord ordained his blessing,
life forevermore.

REFLECTION

When I was a campus pastor at UC Davis, I was involved with the University Religious Council and with the Interfaith Campus Council. The first was a mandatory, official channel of the university, which attempted to corral religious groups and prevent them from harassing students; the second was an optional collaborative group of leaders from different organizations who wanted to build relationships between students of different traditions.

Can you guess which one felt more like kindred living together in unity?

The ICC included representatives from Lutheran, Episcopal, Unitarian Universalist, Methodist, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim communities. Each fall, we hosted the Moveable Feast, a progressive dinner through each of our buildings. Students ate a different course of the meal at each stop, learning a little bit about the tradition of those whose house they were in, and mixing and mingling with each other along the way.

In the winter, we'd host Speedfaithing, which was like speed dating, but with the hope of making a friend of a different religion, not necessarily getting a date. (Though that happened, too! They were college students, after all.)

And in the spring, we hosted the Interfaith Games, a field day of relay races and other silly sporting events, culminating in a very coveted plastic trophy.

These events did not solve interreligious or intercultural strife on campus, but they helped our students understand each other better and stand in solidarity with each other more bravely.

When Jewish or Muslim communities faced harm (on or off campus) the ICC gathered to care for them. When students got into their new classes each quarter—even at an institution of 40,000—they would see someone they'd met at an ICC event and decide to be lab partners. Some of them even became housemates! It was very good and pleasant.

QUESTIONS

It is good and pleasant for us to dwell together in unity. Good and pleasant like precious oil and like the dew. What else is it like? What is good and pleasant, in your experience?

ACTION

Learn something new about someone who is your kindred. That could be a member of your extended family (where did your ancestors live together in the past? Was there unity?) or someone you consider a kindred spirit.

PRAYER

God of all the nations, bring unity among us as we strive for peace on earth. Remind us that we are all created in your image, your beloved children. Amen.



AUGUST 23, 2026—THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members and not all

the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

REFLECTION

We are richly blessed here at SMLC with the many gifts that all of you have been given by God. If you were here in May, you may have attended or participated in our talent show and raffle. We had performers—including a hula hooper!—and those who offered tangible talents, showcasing their gifts and skills through handmade items or the offer of expertise. It was a lovely afternoon of receiving each others' gifts and celebrating the different things we have to share with one another.

The Apostle Paul would be so proud.

This passage from his letter to the Romans is a popular one, as it highlights the beauty in our diversity. It reminds us that sameness is not our goal, but celebration of what sets us apart from one another in the rich tapestry of God's creation. It is okay if you look around at the gifts of others and do not have the same ones. It is ideal, really!

It is important, as we notice how gifted we all are, that we do not begin to rank our gifts. None of us should be sizing up the giftedness of others, determining that our gifts are the best—or the worst. That is far beyond the point. The point is to give glory to the God who gave us the gifts by using them in service of God and of one another.

Reading this list now, I am moved by "the encourager" as a giver. I get to be an encourager often in my work, and it is a great blessing. Whenever anyone comes to me feeling small, or hopeless, or anything less than the beloved child of God I know them to be, I get to remind them of who they are and whose they are.

Maybe you are someone who finds it easy to encourage others. Or maybe your gifts are in teaching, or in leading, or in being cheerful! There are more gifts given to us by God than Paul or anyone could ever list.

QUESTIONS

What gifts has God given you? How do you express them?

ACTION

We have seen and appreciated the gifts of our friends and community members. Have we told them? Compliment someone (or more than one person!) in your community on a gift you've seen them share.

PRAYER

Good and gracious God, we know that every good and perfect gift comes from you. Encourage us to share our gifts with one another, and to celebrate all that you have made. Amen.



AUGUST 30, 2026—FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord." Instead, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink, for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

REFLECTION

This is a long list of instructions, isn't it? I hope you are not overwhelmed by it, and worried about measuring up. The good news is that you do not have to do all of these things at once, and you do not have to do all of them perfectly or right away. There will not be a surprise inspection.

Some of these instructions seem more challenging to follow than others. Read over them again and notice which ones stand out to you as challenging. I'll take a wild guess that you're at least a little wary of blessing those who persecute you, and not repaying evil for evil. Those are both incredibly difficult! When we are harmed, it is very easy to react in kind. We want to lash out and make someone else hurt as we are hurt, don't we? It would certainly be satisfying in the moment.

But what the Apostle Paul is trying to get the newly-gathered Roman church to work on is living life a different way. To take a look at the culture around them, see the consequences of that way of life, and to interrupt those cycles. Vengeance breeds vengeance; violence breeds violence; fear breeds fear. If we continue to respond to those who harm us by harming them, we just create more harm. Responding to evil with evil corrodes us. Eventually, we will not be able to tell ourselves apart from those whose actions we find abhorrent. This is not how God wants us to live together in harmony.

You have probably heard the adage to "kill 'em with kindness." If we respond unexpectedly to those who wish us harm—with kindness, generosity, warmth, and even by meeting their needs—we can sometimes disrupt and reroute the harm altogether. When everyone has what they need (physically, emotionally, and spiritually) conflict is greatly reduced. It feels daunting, but we can overcome evil with good. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said we often sing (ELW 721), "Goodness is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, light is stronger than darkness, life is stronger than death. Victory is ours through God who loves us!"

QUESTIONS

Which of these instructions did you find most interesting? Maybe there is one that is "easy" but that you hadn't thought about focusing on. Do you need to practice being patient in affliction? Do you know what it feels like to persevere in prayer? What else do these words bring forward for you?

ACTION

Pick one of these and work on it for the rest of the week. Decide what it means for your daily life to be ardent in Spirit, or to rejoice in hope, or not to lag in zeal! See how it feels to live in a new way.

PRAYER

God of love, rejoice with us as we rejoice, and weep with us as we weep. Encourage us to live in harmony with all of your beloved creation. Amen.

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