



Shepherd's Staff

HAPPY THANKSGIVING

The Monthly Newsletter of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

November 2025



Josh Brecht

Lead Pastor

The Equipping Church - A Paradigm Shift

Every fall the Central States Synod hosts a Fall Theological Conference for church leaders. Pastors, Deacons, SAMs (Synodically Authorized Ministers) gather for a couple days to learn, pray, connect, and vision for ministry. I always look forward to these events as a chance to step away from the busyness of day-to-day ministry, reflect and pray, and talk with other leaders about where God is moving.

This year was different. It was not hosted at a hotel, but an Episcopal conference center. It was not the typical three days, but only two. I was skeptical. I almost opted to stay home, but Pastor Amy and I went and I am so glad we did!

The conference was held in **Founders Hall** at **Grace and Holy Trinity Episcopal Cathedral**. Why here? A few years ago, the rent for Synod offices was raised significantly. Our Episcopal siblings have a beautiful Cathedral and facility that also houses the Episcopal Diocese of West Missouri. They had extra office space to share, and a beautiful collaboration was born. Today, the Episcopal Diocese and our Synod staff share a common space that deepens ecumenical partnership and better stewards our resources.

The keynote speaker and highlight of the event was Rev. Dr. Craig Nesson. Dr. Nesson also happens to be one of the most influential professors I had while at Wartburg Seminary. Dr. Nesson's teaching was profound. It was clear, yet challenging and the basic premise was this.

The attractional church is dying. The future is an equipping church.

For centuries, the Church has become more clergy-centric relegating the work of ministry to those who are ordained, rather than equipping all baptized Christians for their ministry in the world. Dr. Nesson said, "*The clergy-centric model has disenfranchised the people of God*" by discounting the spiritual gifts God has given.

The attractional church focuses on getting more people to come to *our church*, to *our ministries*. The equipping church focuses on developing the spiritual gifts in each person, equipping and sending them out for ministry in their daily lives. The attractional church focuses on propping up the religious institution. The equipping church focuses on building up the body of Christ, and bringing the message of God's love, mercy, and grace to our communities. The attractional church does big, exciting events to get more people to come to *our church*. The equipping church looks for the places people gather in the community, then goes out to bless them with love and support.

It sounds simple, yet it is a complete paradigm shift in what it means to be church. It may sound cutting edge, but it is actually a rediscovery and recommitment to our roots. The early church had no institution, no clergy (as we think of them today), thus *every believer* was a ministry, sent out to join the work of the Spirit in the world. Martin Luther's reformation was, in part, about eliminating the wall between clergy and laity, believing firmly in "the priesthood of all believers" and striving to get the Word of God in the hands of everyone.

Dr. Nesson's vision is bold, but I believe, spot on. Pastor Amy and I spent the *whole 4 hour ride home* talking over all the ways this vision might transform our communities and how we do ministry through Good Shepherd.

For some, this call to transformation felt abrupt, shocking, or unsettling. But for me and Good Shepherd? It feels **energizing**. I truly believe that part of the reason GSLC has continued to thrive when others have struggled is *because* equipping people for ministry has long been a part of our culture. Service ministry is constantly flowing out of Good Shepherd, both formally and informally. Caring for people in times of sickness or struggle happens all the time. So many adults give of their gifts to mentor

young people in the faith. Sure, we still have plenty of elements built on the attractional church model, but the seeds have long been planted to grow into an equipping church. The Spirit is moving, and I cannot wait to see what God will do as each of us leans into our calling more and more every day.

If you want to learn more about how this movement is emerging, check out **the CaSTLE Project**. Wartburg Seminary received a \$7.4 million grant through the Lilly Foundation to revitalize small town and rural congregations. The equipping church vision is how they will make a profound change for the future.

Grace & Peace,
Pastor Josh

Thanksgiving Dinner Food Drive

by: Karen Kallansrud

Give thanks for all you have by donating a Thanksgiving dinner for a family in St. Louis who is struggling with food insecurity. Join us in Good Shepherd's long-standing tradition of providing Thanksgiving meals to families in St. Louis.



We are again partnering with Wings of Love and Care Food Pantry/Crisis Aid. They have been feeding and supporting families throughout the years.

Angie Liggins, the program director for Wings works closely with schools in St. Louis who have families living below the poverty level, who will be receiving meals this year. In addition, meals will also go to families around the neighborhood of Wings on South Jefferson.

This year Good Shepherd will collect all the staple items for 150 family boxes. Each box will include:

- 2 cans of (14 oz) corn
- 2 cans of (14 oz) green beans

- 1 can of (14 oz) cranberry sauce
- 2 cans of (15 oz) yams or sweet potatoes
- 1 box of (6 oz) stuffing
- 1 box of mac and cheese with liquid cheese sauce pouch
- 2 packets of gravy mix
- 1 roasting pan
- 1 box of Little Debbie treats

There are 3 ways you can help.

1. Purchase items to fill the boxes:

Look for the display in the narthex. There will be a basket with the list of items needed that you can take with you to the store. All items need to be back at church by **November 16**.

2. Donate money to buy a turkey:

Good Shepherd will collect \$25 donations to buy a turkey for each box. When writing a check, please put "Thanksgiving Turkey Donation" on the memo line of your check. You can donate electronically using the link below, through the Good Shepherd app, or via the [church website](#).

Turkey Donations

3. Donate your time:

Sunday, November 16: We will have the BIG SORT after the 11:00 service. We will count all the items and box them up for Angie to pick up on Tuesday, November 18.

Thursday, November 20: We will bring a group of about 20 people from Good Shepherd down to Wings to help pack up the food.

Friday, November 21: Good Shepherd members will help distribute the boxes to the clients.

Both days we will carpool from church leaving at 8:30 am. The address for Wings is 3137 S. Jefferson. Look for the sign-up sheets on the Thanksgiving display board.

What a blessing it is to be able to work together this year to provide meals for families in need.

FLY Motivational Speech Given by Josh Baluka During FLY Bonfire Night October 22, 2025

Hello everyone, I'm Josh Baluka, I am a freshman at Parkway South High.



Although I am a freshman giving you guys motivation for your faith journey may seem odd, but the only reason I'm standing here right now is because Jesus has given me 15 years to live so far.

John 3:16 has always had a place in my heart ever since I began my walk with Jesus, because it explains in one verse what Jesus came here to do and God's love for us.

The love of God has been the fuel of my faith and yet it never runs out. God has changed my life in so many subtle ways such as, my phone is one of the last things I touch in the morning. I read the Bible daily and read my devotionals daily. Although these things are subtle, they have brought me closer to God because they honor Him and put Him first before anything else.

These subtle things have also helped me with my daily and school life; such things are I am typically watching/reading/listening to things that motivate me or inspire me. I have more inner strength when things don't go as planned, and I am more often calm and centered instead of anxious or stressed.

Thank you all for your time.

Wild Earth Church

Recently, at Wild Earth Church, participants wrote a psalm together, inspired by their time in nature, connecting with God. Enjoy this beautiful poem and

consider joining us at a future Wild Earth Church gathering:



Only in silence and stillness can we perceive the intricacies of nature and of the Divine.

The leaves of the trees are outstretched to the heavens, waving in the breeze like uplifted hands, swaying to the music of a hymn, proclaiming Hallelujah!

God is like calm waters, peaceful and serene, but still sending ripples and movement to let you know God's there.

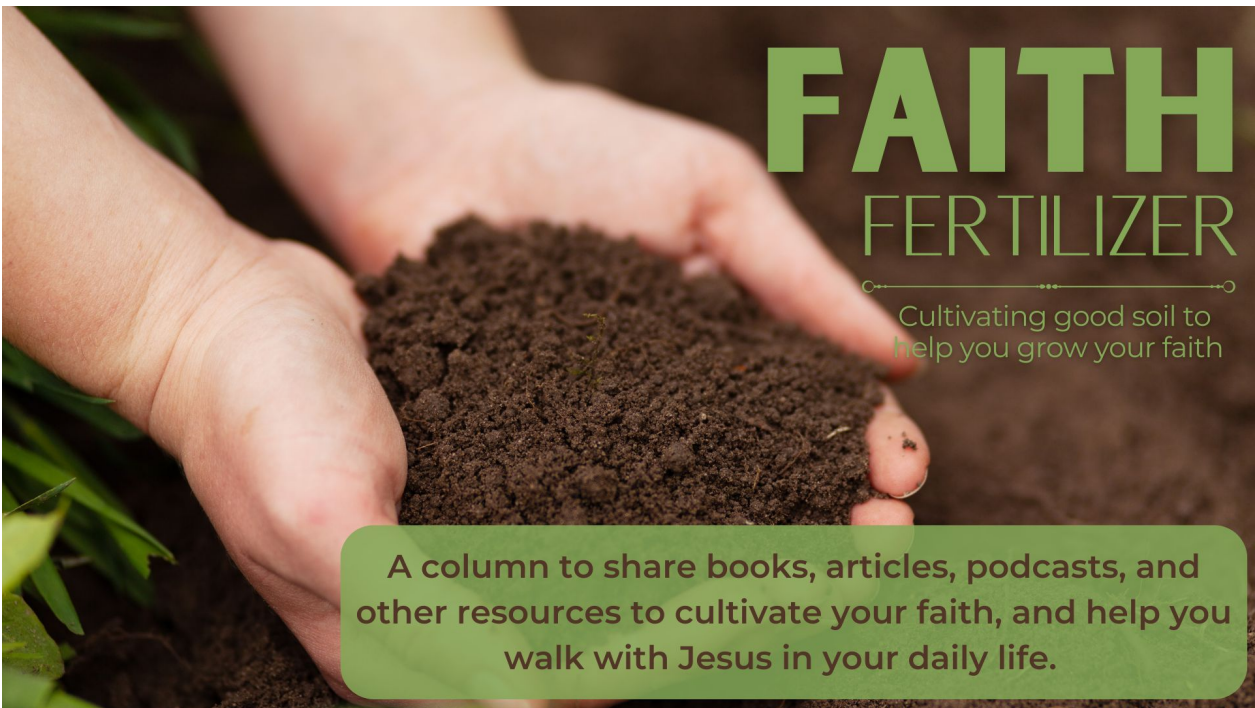
God speaks through the wind, giving direction, bringing change.

Spirit is like the crisp morning air, sometimes comforting and refreshing, sometimes playful, sometimes stirring us to alertness and purposeful movement.

God is another on the path who greets you with a warm welcome and unhindered smile.

God reminds me through what I see, here, and feel, of the joys of outside as a child.

*Peace,
Pr. Amy*



What I am Reading **by: Pr. Josh Brecht**

The Violence of Love – Oscar Romero

I knew little about Archbishop Oscar Romero until I attended Wartburg Seminary. Once I heard the story of his life, his heart for the poor, and his assassination during mass, I was transfixed.

Oscar Romero was a Catholic priest in El Salvador during one of the most violent and difficult eras in that country's history. Romero became Archbishop of San Salvador in 1977. This was during a time when the church and the people of El Salvador were violently persecuted by a corrupt, power-hungry government. People would be disappeared, tortured and killed. Churches that dared to speak out about injustice were attacked.

Archbishop Romero's heart was for the poor and the suffering. What made his preaching and ministry so effective was that he always called for the "conversion" of those doing harm to the people. He fearlessly spoke out against injustice, but was relentlessly committed to the call of Jesus to love enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Despite his own fierce commitment to non-violence, on March 24, 1980, Archbishop Romero was assassinated while presiding over the Eucharist during mass.

As we have seen violence escalating in our country today, my heart has been heavy. I was heartbroken when I saw videos of a pastor praying outside a detention facility shot in the head by federal agents with a pepper bullet. Jesus said, “when I was in prison you visited me,” yet when priests tried to bring communion to those detained, they were denied and forced to leave. As I have seen these attacks on clergy and the normalization of injustice and violence, I knew I needed to revisit the spiritual wisdom of Oscar Romero. The Violence of Love is not authored by Romero, but rather a collection of his word from his homilies and teachings.

“We have never preached violence, except the violence of love, which left Christ nailed to a cross, the violence that we must each do to ourselves to overcome our selfishness and such cruel inequalities among us.

The violence we preach is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love, of brotherhood, the violence that wills to beat weapons into sickles for work.”

Oscar Romero’s words continue to echo across the world today, reminding us that every human being is the image of God. His words are an inspirational call to recommit our hearts, our minds, and our actions to the way of Jesus that loves no matter what.



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