

The Lumberjacks

Our Cottage Meetings, along with our August Voter's Meeting, revealed many things about our congregation. All of us are concerned about the future of St John Lutheran Church. Some of us long for the way things used to be when St. John had a large congregation and vibrant school--and still grieve the loss. Others of us remember what used to be but want to embrace whatever God has planned for us now and in the future. There are those who want to save every penny we have to help us survive as long as possible and others that want to invest that money into the lives of our community in order to share Jesus with them in the hopes of being a congregation that lives beyond all of our lives. Some of us want to keep all things just as they are in order to be comfortable and hope others will come and join us. Others want to change whatever needs to be changed, in order to become relevant in our community once again.

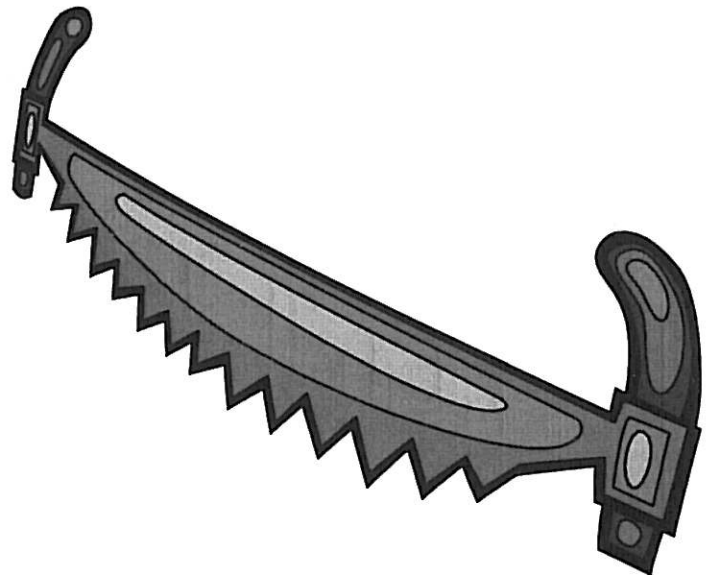
Maybe an illustration will help make the point of my article.

We stand before a forest of trees. They are tall and ready for harvest. We have harvested before--in fact, numerous times--and have fond memories of reaching tremendous success. There was a time when we had unlimited energy and our saws were all sharp. We knew just how to use them and the trees were easily brought into our lumberyard. It almost seemed at times that we didn't even have to go out and work...the trees seemed to come into our yard on their own and we rejoiced over the harvest. We were so well-suited for our forest that our work was really no work at all.

Then the strangest thing happened. Without our knowing, the trees changed. Somehow, the trees became resistant to our saws, technique and energy. We took our saws to the forest and worked until we could hardly stand, yet there was a limited harvest. We even made our saws look brand new and replaced some of the parts that looked worn, yet there was no harvest. We adjusted our clothes, bought new gloves, ate a healthy dinner and even took vitamins. Heading out to the forest we had high expectations and a positive attitude, yet there was no harvest.

In an adjacent forest there were others who were experiencing a larger number of cut trees. They are experiencing the joy we once had when we were able to go into the forest and bring in the larger harvest.

We really don't like what they are doing but can't deny it is effective. Their saws are loud, motorized, chain-spinners and seem really dangerous to us. "Incomprehensible," we say, "why would anyone want to go into a forest and harvest with such nonsense?" Yet they succeed. Even our own children cease wanting to work with our beautiful handsaws and leave us to join those who are succeeding. They tell us that the new saws are exciting and really help them to understand what harvesting is all about. They are experiencing the purpose of having a lumberyard in the way we once did. We look at them and remember. We remember what it was like when our saws were best. Now, our saws look beautiful. We keep them maintained as best we can and, in fact, that is what takes up most of our time. Maintaining our saws has replaced the joy of harvesting. Fearing the day when there won't be enough of us to maintain our saws and lumberyard, we hold on even tighter to them. So tight is our grip that we are too tired and focused on what we have that we forget about the trees in our forest...and the joy of the harvest.



The point is that I think I fully understand where some of the fears are coming from. Some of the members of this church can remember what it was like to worship over 600 people...maybe even 700 or 800. We can remember seemingly unlimited funds and the ability to do whatever our hearts desired to touch our community and it worked. Now some are afraid of spending all our money on programs and things they don't understand.

Some are concerned enough to vote to reject the proposed budget because the Family and Youth Director position and funds were in it. Concerned about spending all of that money and having less to use to pay bills later, some were very open in that meeting. Good friends even voted in opposition to each other. People with whom I have a good relationship voted to send me on my way, out of concern for spending all of the church's money. Trust me...I understand.

I don't want to spend the money either. Hear me clearly on this one...I want to invest that money! If we are not yet ready to invest it into the lives of our community, let's invest it in the lives of those coming into our school. We have a history of that! Today is a new day and we have many families who need us to share the love of Jesus with them. Besides, none of the money in our bank accounts is ours anyway. It is God's.

The congregation--by a large majority of the voter's meeting--voted to approve the position of the Director of Family and Youth Ministry for another year. We have over \$14,000 in grant money from Thrivent to spend in Family and Youth ministry and other outreach ministries. Here is my challenge: Let us commit ourselves to a full and sincere effort to care for the families of our church and school with the funds that are committed. Let's ask the Spirit to make the Father's purpose for this year clear and commit ourselves--under His power--to making it happen. Then we will truly know what can be accomplished through this place.

To begin with, we are having a Harvest Party on October 22nd from 10:00 am until 1:00 pm. We will be promoting this with the school and hope to promote it during the Rummage Sale and Food Pantry nights. We expect to have the involvement of 30-50 children and their parents. In order to accomplish all that we have planned, we will need 15-20 volunteers from our congregation. Here is a chance to put our hearts and lives where our money is. We would also like to offer at least six, and maybe monthly, lunches for our school families. A simple, yet healthy, meal to tell our school families that we love them and more importantly, Jesus loves them!

Those activities alone are enough to involve 50+ of our members and there is more we will have planned throughout the year. Can we do it? Will YOU do it!?! Contact me as soon as you can and let me know that you will take the risk and be a part of our Family and Youth Ministry this year. I can be reached through church, my cell, or email. Please call, I am praying for you!

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Facebook: "Friend" me by my name or "like" our Fantastic Families or St. John pages.