

When I accepted God's call to be the next pastor here at Bethlehem Lutheran Church and move to Buffalo Center, I was filled with excitement about what God was up to. Moving back to a small town in the Midwest; to a congregation with a varied age demographic and an active Sunday school; and coming off a productive interim period with strong leaders in place, there was much about which to be excited. And now, five months in, the momentum continues and is getting stronger. With stabilization comes building, and that building is happening and beginning to bear fruit; and this is just the beginning.

Listening to Cassie's president's report at this year's annual meeting really put things in perspective for me. She had looked back to prior president's reports and shared how bleak Bethlehem's picture looked back then: Financially strapped, a pandemic, pastoral transition, etc. I have also listened to stories from others and that sentiment is definitely shared. But now things are different. I see excitement and hope. I see passion and energy. I see purpose and drive. I see leaders ready to lead. And new leaders rising up. I see God on the march, and He is taking us with Him.

On Monday, January 24, there was a planning meeting for Buffalo Cener's new community youth ministry called 1G (One God) Network (more information can be found in this newsletter). There were 25 people there (6 from Bethlehem) from a number of congregations in the North Iowa school district. A total of seven congregations have expressed a desire to be involved. People were excited and recognized the need for this ministry to thrive. I was thrilled to see the turn out.

Back on the home front, Sunday school is thriving, and confirmation is evolving. Women's Bible study is gaining traction and I am hoping other Bible studies will begin to form. Not in a Bible study? Let's get one started. You give me the day and time and I will be there (or help you be there to lead).

Yes, I know you are busy. You have jobs, careers, families, and activities with the kids or grandkids. You volunteer and serve; you give and give; and the thought of doing one more thing at church sounds overwhelming. But let me say this: Do not let it be overwhelming. Remember what I said, **God is on the march, and He is taking us with Him.** Therefore, whatever God is up to and wherever He is going, He will see that you have all that you need. So do not shy away but embrace the future that God has for us. Now, who's ready to march?