

A PASTORAL LETTER FOR THE BEGINNING OF FALL

Let the Word of Christ Dwell in You Richly

Saint Paul's Lutheran Church | Troy, Illinois | September 2026

The beginning of fall brings us back to many familiar routines. After a busy summer, I am also trying to get back into the routine of writing something for the newsletter each month. This month's article is something of a cornucopia. There are several things happening at Saint Paul's, along with a few things that occupied my time during the summer.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." - Colossians 3:16

This verse provides a good thought for us as we begin the fall. The Word of Christ dwells among us as we hear it proclaimed in worship, study it together, teach it to our children, sing it in our hymns, and speak it to one another. The various activities of the congregation are not simply things to keep us busy. Through them, the Lord keeps His Word among us and uses that Word to strengthen our faith in Christ.

A New School Year

A new school year has begun for the children of our congregation. Some are beginning school for the first time, while others are entering a new grade, a new school, or even college. The new year has also begun at our Early Childhood Center. We are thankful for the children and families whom the Lord has placed in our care. Each day brings an opportunity to surround these children with God's love and to tell them about Jesus.

Please remember our students, parents, teachers, and ECC staff in your prayers. Ask the Lord to grant them patience, wisdom, safety, and joy in their work. Most of all, pray that the Word of Christ would dwell richly in our children and in their homes.

New Members of Our Ministry Staff

Over the summer, we added two people to our ministry staff.

Elizabeth Meschke is serving as our part-time Director of Christian Education. A Director of Christian Education helps a congregation plan and coordinate its educational ministries. Elizabeth will work with the pastor, boards, volunteers, children, youth, and families to strengthen Christian education at Saint Paul's. She will also help us build relationships with the families of our ECC and find new ways to engage the children and younger families of both our congregation and community.

Christian education is more than passing along information. Its purpose is to teach the faith, help people grow in the Scriptures, and keep Christ and His promises before them throughout their lives. We are thankful to have Elizabeth helping us with this important work.

Karen Shimkus is serving as our choir director. The choir will begin rehearsing on September 1. The choir helps lead the congregation in singing "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." Church music is not merely decoration added to worship. Through our hymns and sacred music, the Word of Christ is placed upon our lips and sung into our ears and hearts. We are grateful that Karen will be sharing her gifts with us.

If you enjoy singing, please consider joining the choir. You do not need to be a professional musician. A willingness to learn, sing, and serve the congregation is a good place to begin.

We are also pleased that James Pape and his wife, Leah, will be with us during the coming year. Please take an opportunity to welcome them and help them feel at home in our life together at Saint Paul's. We give thanks that the Lord has brought James and Leah into our midst, and we look forward to getting to know them better in the months ahead.

Confirmation and Engaging Families

Confirmation instruction also begins again in September. During Confirmation, our young people study the Scriptures and Luther's Small Catechism as they grow in their understanding of the Christian faith. They learn about the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Baptism, Confession and Absolution, and the Lord's Supper.

Confirmation is not a graduation from church. It is part of a lifetime of hearing, learning, confessing, and living in the Word of Christ. Please pray for our students and their families as Confirmation classes begin.

One of our particular areas of focus this fall is engaging the members of Saint Paul's and reaching out to younger families. The Lord has placed many families in our orbit through the ECC, our congregation, and the surrounding community. We want to know them, listen to them, serve them, and invite them into the life we share in Christ.

This is not work that belongs only to the pastor, the Director of Christian Education, or a committee. Every member of Saint Paul's can help. A welcome, a conversation, an invitation to worship or Bible class, or a kind word to a parent can open a door. The Lord often works through seemingly small encounters to bring people into contact with His Word.

Summer Writing Projects

During the summer, I was also engaged in several writing projects.

After more than twenty-five years of work, I finally completed a draft of my family genealogy and history. Family history is more than a collection of names and dates. It tells the stories of the people and events through which the Lord has given us our place in this world. For anyone interested, I am sharing something from this project each week through a blog and podcast at

history.collver.biz

I also finished the manuscript of a book that I began before being called to Saint Paul's. Its title is *Bad Boll: Missouri at the Crossroads - The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's Forgotten Postwar Conferences in Germany, the International Lutheran Council, and the Road to Seminex, 1948-1954*. The book examines a largely forgotten chapter in the history of the Missouri Synod and international Lutheranism. If everything proceeds as expected, it will likely be published next year.

I am also posting weekly material about the people, events, and theological questions behind the book through a blog and podcast at badbollbook.com.

These projects may appear quite different from the beginning of school, Confirmation instruction, choir rehearsals, and outreach to families. Yet each involves remembering, teaching, and passing something along. As Christians, the most important thing entrusted to us is the Word of Christ. We receive that Word from those who came before us, and we teach and confess it for those who come after us.

A Fall Scheduling Note

During the fall, I will be taking vacation over a few weekends to attend dog shows and a hunting event with my dogs. These activities provide an opportunity for me to spend time with the dogs, enjoy the outdoors, and get some rest away from my usual responsibilities. I appreciate the congregation's understanding while I take this time.

As the fall begins, may the Word of Christ dwell richly among us - in our worship, classrooms, homes, music, conversations, and service to our neighbors. May the Lord bless the new school year, our ECC, our new staff members, James and Leah, our Confirmation students, and all our efforts to engage our members and welcome new families into our life together.

Blessings in Christ,

Pastor Collver