



# The Evangel

In the heart of the city for ministry to the world

A Reconciling in Christ Congregation

May—June 2009

## Opening the Book of Faith or How to read the Bible Lutheranly

By Pastor Christian Jennert

We find ourselves in interesting times when it comes to reading (or not reading) the Bible. Once considered a “Reformation breakthrough” by Martin Luther, the Latin phrase *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) emphasized that not only priests, bishops and the pope can read and interpret the Bible, but every baptized Christian who is able to read. Luther translated the Bible into the German vernacular, and

made the written Word accessible to the people. Little did he know that he had opened a can of worms. What needs to be considered is that one of his best intentions, to make God’s written Word accessible to all, would only a few hundred years later result in a Biblical literalism that was foreign not only to Luther but to most Christians before modern times.

In the 21st century we find ourselves between two extremes: an increasing biblical illiteracy on the one hand and a literal, fundamentalist reading of the Scriptures on the other. It may not come as a surprise that we can find both in our ELCA. So

the question before us is: How can we increase the reading of the Bible; and encourage people in our churches to read the Bible for themselves – be it for devotion, in a small group setting or another church event. And how can we teach people, when they do read the Scriptures, to not make the “modern mistake” of reading the Bible in a fundamentalist fashion which has become increasingly popular, even among mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics.

My piety has always been “Bible-based”. For me, Scripture feeds me, inspires me, tells me who God is and how God

has acted (and continues to act) in history. The Bible is also a book of personal comfort and consolation. Hence, I am all in favor of “becoming more fluent in the first language of faith”—the Bible. The ELCA launched an initiative at the Churchwide Assembly in 2005 called “Book of Faith” that would provide the church with resources, ideas and encouragement to (a) intentionally offer programs and groups that encourage the reading of the Bible and (b) at the same time teach the Lutheran way of approaching and reading these texts. Now, four years later, we find ourselves with new resources that help congregations and synods to actively participate and become Book of Faith congregations and synods.

*(cont. on p. 2)*

### Small group Bible studies continue...



*St. Francis of Assisi appeared on Marge Jencks’ deck to offer cookies to leader Mary Carlton Lull at the East Bay small group Bible study.*

## Haydn Chamber Music Concert

Friday, May 29, 7:30 p.m.

Mark your calendars for Friday, May 29, when St. Mark’s Interim Organist David Auerbach



will present a lively concert showcasing the work of Austrian classical composer Joseph Haydn. Watch upcoming weekly announcements for details on this musical event!

**Join us for worship!****On Sundays:**

9:00 a.m. Holy Communion  
with Children's Time

11:00 a.m. Choral Eucharist

**On Wednesdays:**

6:45 p.m. Midweek  
Communion Worship

**Book of Faith (cont.)**

St. Mark's has embarked on that course. You may have noticed that we offer three new Bible studies this Easter Season, two in San Francisco and one in the East Bay, that invite people of St. Mark's to actively participate in Bible reading and Bible study. *(If you don't have a good Bible, you can order the new Lutheran Study Bible by calling the church office.)*

Across the ELCA, pastors and lay leaders are invited to participate in educational events to promote biblical literacy among our church members and at the same time learn how to teach the distinctly Lutheran way of reading the Bible. One of those events was the Hein-Fry lecture at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary on April 22. Dr. Craig Nesson from Wartburg Seminary lectured on "Interpreting the Bible Lutheranly" *(hence, my headline for this article).*

In a presentation that was both scholarly and accessible, Dr. Nesson introduced eight characteristics of a Lutheran reading of the Bible. *(Craig Nesson's full presentation is available at PLTS' website: [plts.edu/news](http://plts.edu/news).)*

The following are the eight "navigational instructions" to read and understand the Bible in a Lutheran fashion.

**#1. God Speaks!**

When God speaks, things happen and/or come into being. Scriptures witness to that fact. There is an efficaciousness to God's word (cf. 2 Tim 3:16). Nevertheless, God always remains sovereign over Scripture and God continues to create ever anew.

**#2. The Finite Bears the Infinite**

I consider this the "sacramental understanding" of the Scriptures: God is revealed in the Scriptures; the Bible is full of God's word in the midst of human words; God speaks through this book of faith to us.

**#3. Privileging the Literal Sense**

The first literal reading is the normative starting point for all Bible study. Martin Luther always gave priority to the plain, literal sense of a Bible passage over the medieval allegorical interpretations and over the interpretation of church councils and pope. The "literal sense" here means understanding the text in connection to the earliest community to which it was addressed.



*Phyllis DeSpain and Gail Culp  
on Easter Sunday.*

**#4. Law and Gospel**

This specific and genuine Lutheran theological understanding of the Scriptures distinguishes parts of the Bible that we hear as "law" and other parts that we hear as "gospel". Neither law nor gospel are limited to the Old or New Testament. Gospel can be found in the OT and law can be found in the NT. Law shows what God expects of us and that we fall short again and again of God's commandments. The law drives us to the Gospel, God's sheer grace by which we have been saved. The gospel fills us with pardon and hope. Here the Bible serves as a means of grace. Keep in mind what some hear as "Law" others hear as "Gospel" and vice versa!

**#5. Christ is the Center**

Luther said, "The Bible is the manger of Christ". Jesus Christ is always the center of the Scriptures. We look to where we find Christ in the Bible and how Bible passages present the central doctrine of justification in Scripture to the readers, the so called "Lutheran canon within the canon".

**#6. The Proper Use of Reason**

Luther distinguished clearly when it came to the use of reason. In the "Left Hand Kingdom", or civic realm, reason is the best gift that God can give us to use; that's why Lutherans have always advocated and been involved in higher education. In the "Right Hand Kingdom", or ecclesial realm, reason can never be applied to God's act of salvation. In other words, we cannot make sense of God's mysterious acts by the use of human reason (cf. Phil. 4:7).

**Opening the Book of Faith**  
*(cont.)*

**#7. Living Voice of the Gospel**

The Word of God is always God's Living Word that affects every time and generation to bring life and salvation to all people. There is a plethora of meaning to the Bible: the texts mean new things to new people in new settings. This, too, is part of God's creative Spirit. A word of Caution: we always have to ask, "What is legitimate?" In other words, every "new" interpretation needs to stand the test of time, creeds, councils, confession and doctrine.

**#8. Discerning the Word: The Context of Interpretations**

For Lutheran Christians, all Scripture is based on God's saving grace in Jesus Christ. We always have to keep in mind that Christ is at the center as we discern legitimate from illegitimate readings of the Bible passages. We need to understand the literal sense, we need to listen to marginal readings and we need to be aware of contested readings that do not hold the test of time.

Nessan's conclusion with regard to a Lutheran way to read Scriptures is that each and every generation will have to deal with the questions and struggles before them. As Lutherans who read the Bible we need to navigate among the voices of literalist and fundamentalist voices as well as the deconstructionist interpretation of post-modern readers. The challenge for us today is: Can we provide a credible Lutheran alternative in our reading and interpreting the Bible that can stand the test of time and provide the hope and the salvation that lies in the Bible?

Here end my notes on Dr. Craig Nessan's lecture. My final paragraph summarizes my attitude toward the topic of being a Book of Faith Christian. It is this: Let's not so much talk about the Bible, rather let's dig in and read the Bible. This can be fun, especially when done so in a small group setting! Let's listen to God's living Word more attentively when proclaimed in our worship services and participate in the Bible studies offered by St. Mark's. We're looking forward to seeing you.

Blessings on your endeavors to read the Bible and grow in God's Word!

*Pr. Christian*

*For more info on the ELCA Book of Faith initiative go to [bookoffaith.org](http://bookoffaith.org).*



*Easter morning at St. Mark's...*

*For a wonderful way to read a small portion of Scripture for devotion go to [moravian.org/daily\\_texts/](http://moravian.org/daily_texts/) and sign up for the Daily Texts delivered right to your email inbox.*



*Pictured at the synod sponsored "Book of Faith Workshop" at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Santa Rosa are Mary Carlton Lull, Pastor Christian Jennert, Jan Charter, Dean Atkinson and Jo Chadwick.*

## PLTS Embraces RIC

### Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary becomes the first ELCA Seminary to designate itself as Reconciling in Christ

After prayerful contemplation and deliberate consultation with the seminary community, including graduates, friends, students, faculty and staff, the Board of Directors of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary voted to affirm the following welcoming statement. Our own Pastor Elizabeth has served on the board for 10 years.

*“PLTS is an inclusive community and offers hospitality to all who participate in our programs of study. As disciples of Christ committed to public leadership among God’s people in diverse and challenging cultural contexts, we eagerly learn from and welcome one another’s diversity, including, but not limited to, theological perspective, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, relationship status, age, physical ability, social and economic status and sexual orientation.”*

Along with the adoption of this statement, the PLTS Board has voted to seek designation as a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) seminary. In so doing, PLTS would join 23 synods, 360 congregations and 17 other organizations of the ELCA in affiliating with RIC. Reconciling in Christ, a program of Lutherans Concerned/North America (LC/NA), was started in 1984 to recognize Lutheran congregations that welcome gay and lesbian believers. The RIC program does not specifically address questions regarding the ordination or marriage of openly gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered persons.

PLTS President, Phyllis Anderson, said, “Joining this program is con-

sistent with our Vision Statement: Led by the light of Christ, PLTS is called to embody the Church’s bold and effective engagement with vital issues in an inter-faith and multi-cultural context with a strong Lutheran voice.

Gary Andeen, PLTS Board Chair, said, “The PLTS community has been quietly living and learning together faithfully in the midst of the church’s disagreements about sexual orientation for a long time. With this decision, PLST will now be living openly with that faithful disagreement. Please join the seminary in praying that this community’s tolerance for one another’s opinion will be as sincere and loving in the future as it has been in the past.”

Visit [www.plts.edu](http://www.plts.edu) for more info.

### Adult Forums

Members and friends of St. Mark’s meet Sunday mornings at 10:00 in the Fireside Room in the Urban Life Center. We welcome all to join in learning and exploring together. Our forums for the coming Sundays are:

**Bread for the World  
May 3**

*The Social Ministry Team*

**Peace, Conflict and Public Church: A Case Study on the Future of Iraq  
May 10, 17 and 24**

*Suzanne Smith*

**Bill Moyers Interviews Karen Armstrong, Part II  
May 31**

*Pastor Jennert*

**God’s Work, Our Hands Report on the Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly  
June 7**

**SUMMER BREAK  
June 14 to September 13**



Easter morning at St. Mark’s...





Easter morning at St. Mark's...



## Share your Story

**Conversations regarding the economic crisis and how you have been impacted**

**June 2, 7:00 p.m., Heritage Hall**

How has the current economy affected your life? As a community of faith, we need to be talking about these critical issues in our lives.

You are invited to come and share your story with members of St. Mark's, Old First Presbyterian, and St. Dominic's parish. The clergy of these congregations have been meeting to discuss how the economy has impacted the lives of you, our parishioners. This evening will be an opportunity for you to share your stories, get to know other Christians from our neighboring parishes and find out ways we can work together as communities of faith. Please join us for this important conversation and sharing.

## Reclaiming the Public Good

The Bay Area Organizing Committee, of which St. Mark's is a member, invites you to the

**Northern California Economic Conference on Sunday, May 17**, from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at 1st Presbyterian Church of San Rafael, 1510 5th Ave. (at E Street), in San Rafael.

Together with local and national economists we will:

- Learn about current economic shifts;
- Share how our communities are affected;
- Reflect on what our traditions have to say about the economy;
- Plan how we can act together during these challenging times.

### Confirmed Guests include:

- Dr. Dowell Myers, Professor of Urban Planning and Demography, USC
- Dr. Paul Osterman, Dean, Sloan School of Management, MIT
- Stephen Levy, Director, Center for the Continuing Study of the California Economy
- Scott Graves, Senior Policy Analyst, California Budget Project
- Rabbi Jonah Pesner, Director, Just Congregations, Union for Reform Judaism
- Ernesto Cortes, Jr., SW Regional Director, Industrial Areas Foundation

Please contact Pastor Elizabeth if you would like to attend.



Church Council member Jan Charter serves up pancakes on Easter morning.



Pr. Elizabeth and Duc Huynh share a moment at Duc's anniversary celebration.



St. Mark's pro-am photographer Bob Brouhard at work.



**Our Sanctuary is blessed with beautiful stained glass windows, especially the ten tall arched windows on the side walls.** These original **1894 windows**, which add such beauty and serenity, consist of patterns of small glass panes in shades of gold, yellow, orange, and tan. They are topped by circular designs containing Jewish and Christian symbols in red, blue, gold, white, and purple, which present doctrinal concepts, teach the faith, and beautify our house of God. Sitting toward the front, you can view all ten symbols.

The **four Hebrew letters** spell Yahweh, the name for God in the Old Testament; the **rainbow and Noah's ark** represent God's covenant with humanity and portray God's presence in difficult times; the **Ten Commandments** are on stone tablets which show three commandments on the left that worship and serve God, and seven on the right that serve humanity; the **dove** symbolizes the Holy Spirit and messenger of peace; the **crown** represents Christ's reign and our reward of eternal life; the intertwined **Alpha and Omega**, first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, symbolize the beginning and end of all things; the **Agnus Dei**, the lamb of God, represents Christ with a banner of victory symbolizing Jesus' sacrifice; the **open Bible** symbolizes that the Old and New Testaments are open for all to read; the **chalice** symbolizes Christian faith, worship, Holy Communion, hope, pardon, and peace; and, the **Latin cross** capped with three-lobed tree buds (trefoils) suggest the Holy Trinity.

Note: This is the third in a series of historical tales from the archives. M. Jencks

## Council highlights

### from the March / April Church Council meetings:

#### March

- A student from the University of South Carolina approached St. Mark's looking for a summer internship focused on Youth Ministry. The council asked Pastor Elizabeth to pursue this request.
- St. Mark's updated Employee Handbook was presented, reviewed and approved.
- The St. Mark's Director of Music job description was presented, reviewed and approved with minor amendments.
- A Synod Assembly Memorial Regarding Changes to Roster Policy was presented, reviewed and approved. This Memorial will be brought to the floor at the Synod Assembly.

#### April

- Whitney Worth, a student from the University of South Carolina, will be a summer intern at St. Mark's. She will focus on Youth Ministry.
- Council received a primary and an alternate recommendation regarding window shades for the Kitchen, Nursery, Infant Room, Vestry, South Hall, Storage Room and Heritage Hall from the Property Committee. The primary recommendation is to do all of the aforementioned rooms. The alternate recommendation is to do all the rooms except Heritage Hall. After discussion, Council approved the alternate recommendation.
- A revised Synod Assembly Memorial Regarding Changes to Roster Policy was presented and approved.

## Youth Summer Intern to work at St. Mark's

We are so pleased to introduce Whitney Wolfe who will serve at St. Mark's this summer as our Youth Ministry Intern. Whitney comes to us from Columbia, South Carolina and has just completed her first year of college at the University of South Carolina. She is active as a member of the Alpha Delta Pi sorority and Lutheran Campus Ministry.

Whitney has been very active at her home congregation, St. Andrews in Columbia in their youth programs. She participated and helped organize youth activities and also attended Synod Youth events. She was elected Vice President of the Synod Youth Organization and coordinated state-wide youth events which were very successful and widely attended. She has also been active in coordinating servant projects for youth in urban settings and has been especially gratified with this aspect of youth ministry.

Whitney will serve approximately 5 to 10 hours a week at St.

Mark's, from May 6 – July 12, before she returns to college, as our Youth Intern. Her primary responsibilities will be coordinating youth ministry activities for our High School and Junior High youth – especially youth activities which have a “servant” component! She will work with parents and Pastor Elizabeth in leadership development (youth leaders & parents who want to participate on our Youth and Children's Ministry team), and strengthen our relationship with the Sierra Pacific Synod Youth Organization.

We want to hit the ground running and make the best use of her gifts while she is serving at St. Mark's. Please welcome Whitney to St. Mark's on May 10 at a special coffee hour after the 11:00 service and join her on Sunday, May 10 at 10:00 in the Youth room. We will have an opportunity to meet Whitney and plan some fun youth activities during the summer months. If you have any questions or have ideas about upcoming youth events prior to Whitney's arrival, please contact Pastor Elizabeth.



## Annual Giving 2009

### Forward in Faith

Three year pledge (2009-2011)

No. of pledges	109 out of 235
Pledged	\$525,635
Received thru 3/31	\$73,573

### General Fund

One year pledge (2009)

No. of pledges	127 out of 235
Pledged	\$331,072
Received thru 3/31	\$98,082

### Income vs. Expenses

	Jan-Mar 09	Actual	Budget
Income	\$117,330		\$107,972
Expense	\$126,818		\$125,451
NET	-\$ 9,489		-\$17,479

## Church Office Closures and Summer Hours

Please note that the Church Office will be closed for Memorial Day on **Monday, May 25**.

Summer office hours at the church office begin on Monday, June 1 and continue through Monday, September 7 (Labor Day.)

### Summer hours are:

Monday-Thursday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and  
 Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.



Duc Huynh and his extended family attended the Palm Sunday event celebrating Duc's 20th years of service to St. Mark's.

## Highlighted Activities for May and June

For information on these activities, visit our website at [www.stmarks-sf.org](http://www.stmarks-sf.org), and watch our weekly announcements!

### MAY

3	10 am/12:15 pm	Living Heritage Presentation
	3:00 PM	Parents with Kidlettes Park Outing
9	9:00 AM	Outreach Retreat
	6:30 PM	ABS/German Consulate Concert
16	9:00 AM	Choir Retreat
	7:00 PM	Martin Morley Organ Concert
15	11:00 AM	Senior trip to Barbara's Fish Trap**
21	12:00 PM	Senior Center Luncheon**
	6:30 PM	Church Council Meeting
25		CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED
29	7:30 PM	Haydn Chamber Music Concert
30	6:00 PM	Confirmation Dinner
31		<b>Pentecost</b>
	10:00 AM	LAST DAY OF Sunday School
	11:00 AM	Affirmation of Baptism
	2:00 PM	Auerbach Spring Concert

### JUNE

1		SUMMER OFFICE HOURS BEGIN
2	7:00 PM	Economic Crisis Discussion
4	11:00 AM	Senior Trip to the Legion of Honor**
	6:00 PM	Parish Life Night w/John Clark
7		<b>Trinity Sunday</b>
	10:00 AM	LAST DAY OF Adult Forum
	12:30 PM	LAST DAY OF Junior Choir Rehearsal
11	12:00 PM	Senior Center Luncheon**
17	7:30 PM	LAST DAY OF Adult Choir Rehearsal
18	6:30 PM	Church Council Meeting
27	1:00 PM	Parents with Kidlettes Pool Party

**MLT Independence Day Barbecue is on Thursday, July 2! \*\***

\*\* Contact the MLT office: 415.885.1084

**St. Mark's** is a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop  
The Rev. Mark W. Holmerud, Bishop, Sierra Pacific Synod  
The Rev. Steve Sabin, Dean, San Francisco Conference

#### Sister Parish

Cordero de Dios Lutheran Church in Soyapango, El Salvador



## The Evangel

May—June 2009

St. Mark's Lutheran Church  
1111 O'Farrell Street  
San Francisco, CA 94109

#### Church Office Hours

9:00 am to 5:00 pm, Mon-Fri  
Phone: 415.928.7770

Fax: 415.928.8534

[www.stmarks-sf.org](http://www.stmarks-sf.org)

*St. Mark's is a "Reconciling in Christ" Congregation. St. Mark's is one of over 315 congregations, 22 synods and 12 organizations across the ELCA and the ELCIC (Canada) which have declared that lesbian and gay people are equally welcome to join fully in the worship and life of this Christ-centered community. For more information, please contact Steve Krefting at [krefting@stmarks-sf.org](mailto:krefting@stmarks-sf.org) or 415.826.3124 or speak to one of the pastors.*

#### Staff

**The Rev. Elizabeth E. Ekdale,**  
Lead Pastor

**The Rev. Christian Jennert,**  
Associate Pastor

**Jun Ranches,**  
Director of Church Admin. & Oper.

**Ann Dayton,**  
Administrative Assistant

**Cheryl Garcia,**  
Bookkeeper

**David Auerbach,**  
Interim Organist/Choir Director

**The Rev. Chuck Lewis,**  
Visitation Pastor

**Stacy Cullison,**  
9:00 am Pianist/Organist

**Duc Huynh,**  
Buildings and Grounds Supervisor

**Carl Storey,**  
Security

**Elvira Markov & Tanya Chanthavong,**  
Nursery Assistants

**Jenny Hart,**  
Sunday School Coordinator

**Valerie Taft,**  
Teaching Parish Student

**Randy Schieber,**  
Church Council President