



The STAR of Bethlehem



**Bethlehem Lutheran Church
An LCMS Congregation**

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<https://sites.google.com/view/blcaikensc/home>

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REDACTED WEBSITE EDITION

May 2026

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR ELDERS: ANCHORED IN CHRIST DURING TRANSITION

As we transition from our final Sunday with Pastor Engwall, our hearts are naturally filled with a mix of gratitude for his ministry and uncertainty about what lies ahead. It is okay to feel the weight of this change. However, as Lutherans, we are reminded that while the under-shepherd may change, the True Shepherd—Jesus Christ—remains the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Our church is not built on the shoulders of one man, but on the solid rock of Christ's Word and Sacraments. This season of vacancy is not a time for us to pause, but a time for us to draw closer to one another and to the altar.



The work of our congregation continues with a renewed sense of purpose. Now, more than ever, we need your hands and your hearts. Whether it is serving on a committee, assisting with Sunday duties, or simply checking in on a neighbor in the pew, your active presence is the lifeblood of this community. We are a body with many parts, and every part is vital to the health of the whole. We encourage you to look for where God is calling you to step forward and serve as we bridge the gap toward our next called pastor.

Above all, we ask for your unceasing prayers. Pray for the call committee, for the man God is already preparing to lead us, and for our own congregation to remain patient and unified. Let us approach this search not with anxiety, but with the "peace that surpasses all understanding." We move forward in confidence, knowing that God has always provided for His Church and will continue to do so here. We look forward to seeing you every Sunday as we continue to gather around the Word that sustains us.

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.
Hebrews 13:8*

Blessings,

The Elders



[FROM THE EDITOR:]

Lots of photos this time. Enjoy!

Have you forgotten about the links in the sidebar to the left? I'm still hoping for a volunteer to provide occasional articles of interest from those sources. Talk to me, Debbie C, for more information about what that would entail – it's easy!!



CHURCH COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

Debbie C., Recording Secretary

Our last meeting was April 14. The council and elders are working hard to ensure normality during this time of pastoral vacancy. Joel will be providing regular updates on the call process. next council meeting will be May 17.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED! Mark continues to seek help on the stewardship committee. The altar guild just had two members move away. How about some more ushers to give our elders a break? Did you know- only 3 people showed up for the last church work day. Could you provide a snack and make coffee for Sunday mornings (used during Bible study and before and after the service)? Could you help with streaming the live service- it doesn't take much more than being able to push a button on a laptop. Remember the old saw – “Many hands make light work.” ‘Tis true. Please step up. Speak to Head Elder and Council President Joel C. or any council member if you are willing and able to help in some way, large or small. Thanks!

The MID-YEAR VOTERS' ASSEMBLY will be after the service on June 14. Your Voters' Packets will be emailed unless otherwise requested. The packets will be distributed on or before May 30 and will include the agenda and any items for which a vote may be required such as the approval of the 2025 Financial Review Report. During the meeting, we'll also hear about the status of the call process, receive the most recent financial report, etc. Please plan on attending.

See page 14 for the call committee update.



All items for the newsletter are to be submitted to Debbie C., editor, no later than the 23rd of the month and, upon approval, may be edited for space or clarity.

Early submissions are appreciated.

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Lutheran Resources

LCMS- Free to be Faithful
www.lcms.org/socialissues/freetobe-faithful

Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty
www.LCRLFreedom.org

Lutheran Hour Ministries
<https://www.lhm.org/>

The Lutheran Witness
<https://witness.lcms.org/>

Southeastern District, LCMS
<https://se.lcms.org/>

Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod
www.lcms.org/

Concordia Publishing House
www.cph.org/

International Lutheran Council
www.ILCouncil.org

MAY STEWARDSHIP MESSAGE

By Mark Z.,
BLC Stewardship Chairman

First, let me apologize for an omission in my April message. I failed to include one very important aspect of our daily Christian life. WE'VE GOT THIS, WITH GOD'S HELP!

Now for my May message. What comes to mind when you hear the word Stewardship? Playing, the game of Free Word Association, I think most of us would respond with "money." As Charles Lane points out in his book *Embracing Stewardship*, "many faithful Christians hear 'stewardship' and almost instinctively grab for their wallets to protect them from outside attack." This concept spawns the idea that stewardship is negative.

Obviously, God does not want us approach Stewardship with that attitude.

I'm not a fan of AI yet, but just for fun, I asked Google, "what makes a Christian a good steward?" The response: "A Christian is a good steward by recognizing God owns everything, (time, talents, health and creation) and managing these resources faithfully for His glory. A good steward is characterized as faithful, diligent and loyal, using what they have been entrusted with, whether little or much, to serve others, advance God's Kingdom and honor him.

I also found AI's list of 7 Principles of a Good Steward, so I decided to pass these on as "food for thought."

1. Acknowledgement of God's Ownership – trust that God provides all that we need
2. Understand Your Mission – pray daily for God's plan for us
3. Be Faithful/Trustworthy – ask for forgiveness daily
4. Be diligent – never doubt or give up on God's promises
5. Seek God's Will – pray daily for His guidance
6. Act by the Spirit – follow God's Commandments
7. Give generously – whether you are blessed with a little or a lot, give what you can of your time, talents and treasures

I know there will be times when we do not feel blessed, but that's when we truly need to reach out to the Lord and ask for his forgiveness and support. Take a moment and read Psalm 46:1, Isaiah 41:10, and Philipians 4:13 as a reminder He is always with us.

During this time of Pastoral vacancy, please pray God will guide our lay leaders as we begin the search for our next shepherd. Remember, WE'VE GOT THIS, WITH GOD'S HELP!



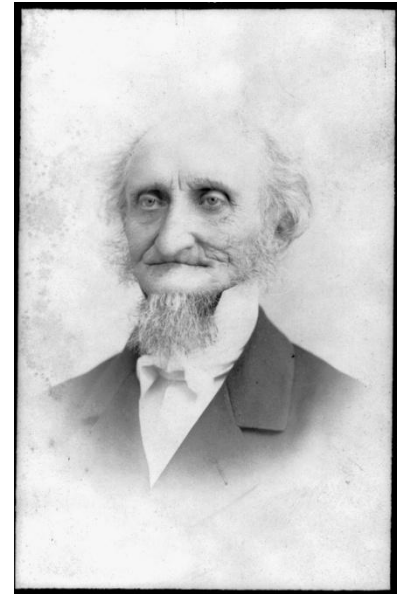
‘A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD’

February 27, 2026, Letter from the President, Print Feature, The Magazine

by Matthew C. Harrison, LCMS President

All Christians are “priests.” There’s a wonderful lithograph photo of Dr. Walther (he looks pretty good in this one) in the front of his postils, or sermon books, long ago published by Concordia Publishing House (CPH). Every pastor has seen it. He [Walther] signed the photo with a quote from 1 Peter 2:9. *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”*

Walther came to emphasize this text for a reason. He was one of the leaders of the Saxon emigrants to Perry County, Mo. Having finally settled in Missouri, the Saxons were traumatized by the removal of their “bishop” for cause. It threw 800 people and a dozen pastors into total turmoil. Walther dug into Luther and the Lutheran Confessions. There, he learned clearly that “Peter’s statement also confirms this, ‘You are ... a royal priesthood’ [1 Peter 2:9]. These words apply to the True Church, which certainly has the right to elect and ordain ministers, since it alone has the priesthood” (Tr 69). And: “Here belong the statements of Christ that testify that the Keys have been given to the Church, and not merely to certain persons, ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name [there I am]’ [Matthew 18:20]” (Tr 68).



Dr. C.F.W. Walther
Image from Library of Congress

All Christians are spiritual priests. Priests offer sacrifices of prayer, praise, speaking the Gospel, love and service. Luther strongly emphasized that each Christian has the right and use of the Keys. In fact, he specifically rejected the idea that “the right of the Keys belongs to the Church but the use thereof to the bishops.” Instead, “Christ here gives the right and the use of the Keys to any Christian.”¹

Luther says a lot on this subject. Pastors are not in a separate higher class from lay persons. Laypeople have a right and responsibility to speak the Gospel and Word of God, forgive sins, judge doctrine. Pastors are not a caste closer to God. Laypeople may baptize in an emergency, because Baptism is what constitutes the church and what the church (the priesthood) possesses as a gift. Luther says the same of the Supper, though does not admit an emergency use with lay administration. The church chooses a qualified man as pastor, confirms that call by ordination, and places him into an office to administer Christ’s gifts in its life publicly. And this happens both in the name of Christ and in the name of the spiritual priests.

Lutheran doctrine teaches that the Office of the Ministry has two aspects. The ways the pastor turns in the Divine Service gives a nice example of these two aspects: The office is both from below (the priesthood of all believers), and from above (the divine institution of the pastoral office). Pastors choose to carry out the office mandated by Christ. When the pastor is true to Christ’s mandate and Word, his mouth is indeed Christ’s mouth. His hands, Christ’s. Luther says this over and over.

Not every spiritual priest is a pastor. “What we have not been mandated to do, we must leave undone. ... It is true: All Christians are priests, but they are not all parish pastors, for [pastors] must not only be Christians and priests, but they must also be entrusted with an office and a parish. It is the call and mandate that makes parish

pastors and preachers. . . . God does not want to have anything done by our own choice or devotion, but everything only by His mandate and call, especially in the preaching office, as St. Peter says in 2 Peter 1:20–21: ‘Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, . . . but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.’”²

But Luther and Walther assert that all Christians have a “general vocation” to speak the Gospel and, even more, to speak forgiveness to their families and neighbors in the context of their lives and many vocations. A layperson does not take over altar, font and pulpit, or meddle by acting like a junior pastor, absolving shut-ins or trying to do the Sacrament at home. But each of us carry on what Luther called “the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren.” In fact, Luther says that the absolution in the mouth of a good friend, spoken in God’s name, is just as valid as that of the pastor.³ Luther even told someone to confess to a lay brother: “If your conscience torments you, consult a godly man, cast your burden before him. If he forgives you, you should accept it; he needs no papal bull for that.”⁴

None of this takes away from the pastor’s ministry. It rather takes what he gives and gives it to others in need of it. This is done when a mother forgives a child or when a teacher says, “You are forgiven by Jesus, and I forgive you,” to a student. We live in an era of tortured consciences. Those consciences need the clear reality of the Law which condemns, but all the more they need the very Gospel of Jesus Christ to be spoken to them.

And the Gospel is much more than information. It’s action. Salutary action. You as spiritual priests have the right and authority to speak forgiveness. Your vocations put you in a relationship of love and service to many around you in home, church, work and community. Pray, serve, love, speak the Gospel. Forgive and invite to church. First Peter says you are a royal priesthood. You have a royal vocation, and one with a life-giving and life-changing purpose: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

In Christ,

—Pastor Matthew C. Harrison

¹ WA 12.184, as quoted in Hellmut Lieberg, *Office and Ordination in Luther and Melancthon* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2020).

² C.F.W. Walther, *The Church and the Office of the Ministry* (St. Louis: CPH, 2012), 155–156.

³ Lieberg, 53.

⁴ WA10/3.398 as quoted in Lieberg, 52.

“Life Together” with President Harrison 3.23.26
email link <https://witness.lcms.org/2026/a-royal-priesthood/>
Retrieved 3.23.26



You can sign up for President Harrison’s
“Life Together” and
other LCMS emailed articles at:
<https://mailchi.mp/lcms/email-signup>

BLC CELEBRATES!

BIRTHDAYS

Doug N
Dana W
Hampton Cr
Patti K
Theron R
Michelle C
Margie T
Linda W



ANNIVERSARIES

John & Nancy M
Mike & Marie O
Hugh & Angela S
Nelson & Angela C
Jim & Kathy S

Contact Debbie C. to add your special occasions or to make corrections.

CALLED HOME TO CHRIST

Herman L

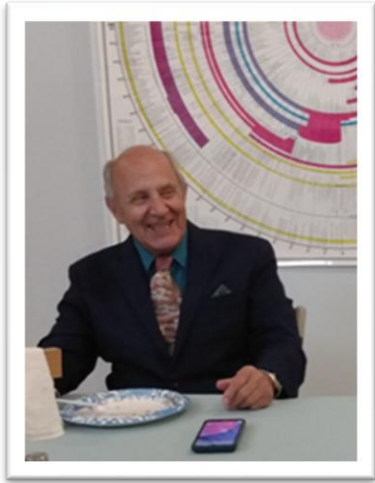


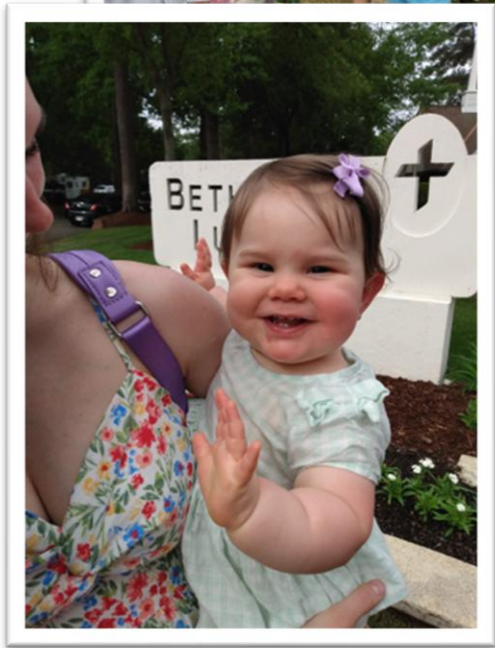
GOOD FRIDAY

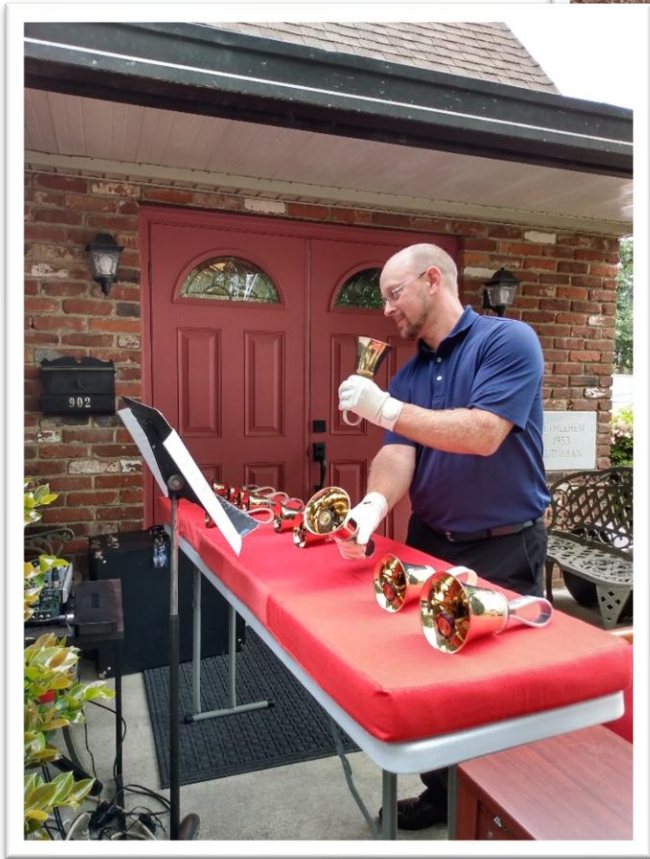
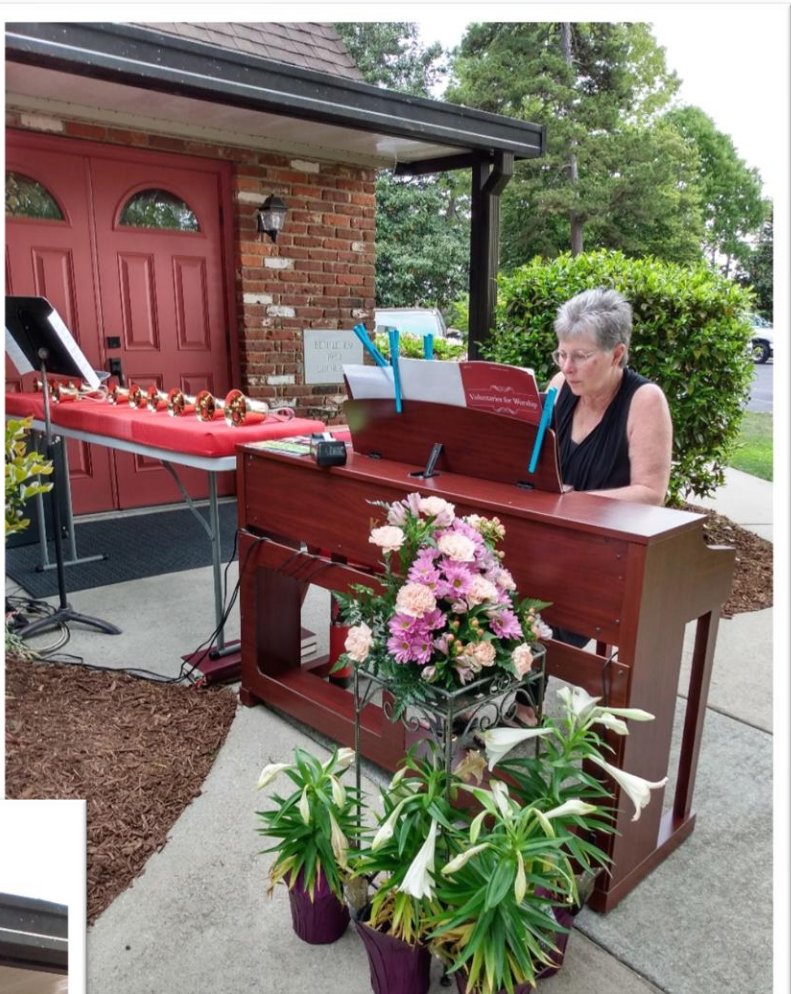
Apr. 3, 2026



EASTER SUNDAY
April 5, 2026
Breakfast, Flowering the Cross, Outdoor Divine Service



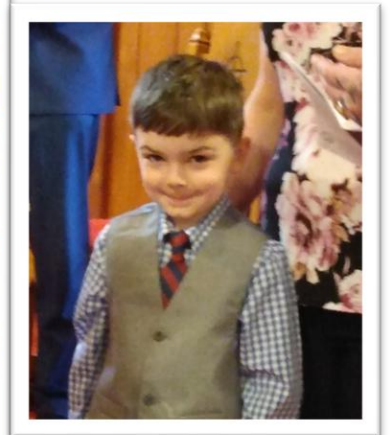
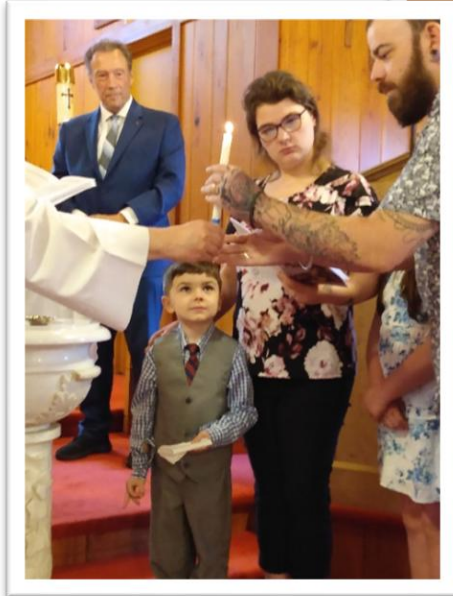




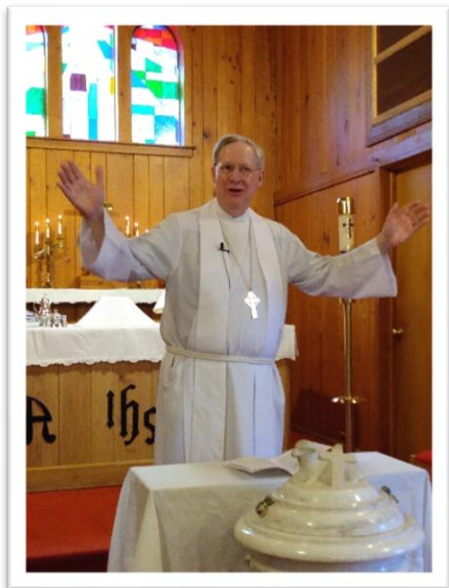


APRIL 19, 2026

WELCOMED IN BAPTISM
AIDYN B



FAREWELL AND GODSPEED TO PASTOR ENGWALL



BENEDICTION

- P The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make His face shine on you and be
gracious to you.
The Lord look upon you with favor and T give
you peace.
- C **Amen.**

FAREWELL ENGWALL'S

Pastor Engwall will be installed at
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Sweet Springs, Missouri
at 4:00p.m. Central time (5:00p.m. Eastern time) on Sunday, May 3rd.

THE ENGWALL'S NEW MAILING ADDRESS:





BLC NIGHT OUT at Sukiya
April 22, 2026



CALL COMMITTEE UPDATE

I will try and use this forum to keep everyone updated on the Call process.

With that being said, the Call Committee's first meeting will be May 7th in the fellowship Hall. The ZOOM meeting with President Harmon will be recorded and available for viewing, by all, after the meeting.

Please complete the "Personal and Pastoral Skills Ranking Worksheet" and return by the end of April, because I have another survey coming. The quicker we get these surveys done, the quicker we can move on the Congregational Profile.

Joel

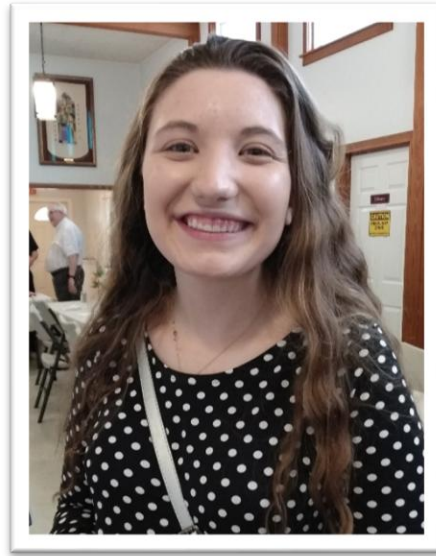


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WELCOME (TRANSFER IN PROGRESS)

SAVANNAH M

Add to your BLC Directory:



ANNOUNCEMENTS

FELLOWSHIP

BLC Night Out – May 19, location TBD

STEWARDSHIP

ACTS Collection – pasta

LIFE CHOICES BABY BOTTLE

COLLECTION will run from Mother's Day to Father's Day. Please pick up a bottle to fill with loose change, cash, or check made out to "Life Choices". (Please! Do NOT make check out to BLC.)

BLC CLASSIFIEDS



To place a classified ad in the *Star*, please submit the information to me by the usual monthly deadline- noon on the 23rd day of the month. **Please use your BLC Directory for contact information.**

~DC

SERVICES OFFERED:

Dana A. (in his "semi-retirement") now is providing residential painting services, available to members and non-members alike. He offers great work at an affordable price, with MANY references available. Services include trim, ceilings, and cabinets.

FOR SALE, wanted, recommendations, Etc.

May 2026

BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH AIKEN, SC

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
26	27	28	29	30	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9am Bible Study 10:30 Service TLC & ACTS			7pm Bible Study			
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
9am Bible Study 10:30 Service Baby Bottle starts Mothers' Day			7pm Bible Study		Ascension	
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
9am Bible Study 10:30 Service TLC			5pm BLC Night Out 7pm Bible Study			
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
9am Bible Study 10:30 Service			7pm Bible Study			
Pentecost	Memorial Day					
31	1					
9am Bible Study 10:30 Service						
		<i>Notes</i>				
						ACTS Collection: spaghetti/pasta 19 - BLC Night Out - location TBD