

**“In All Generations”**

*Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations (Psalm 90:1).*

On All Saint's Day seven years ago, we opened the doors to Emmanuel for the first time in more than six months. We gathered on that day to dedicate a newly restored sanctuary, and it's a day I'll never forget. We began that historic service on the steps of the church and as the bells rang, people flowed into the restored sanctuary with wonderment and awe. Faces beamed and tears streamed as we finally experienced this sacred space together. I still feel a trace of that mountaintop moment each time I walk into this room.

This is another historic day in the life of Emmanuel, and as we dedicate our renovated school building today, I want you to understand why this project is so important – and I can't imagine a better day on which to do it. Today, as we observe All Saints' Day, we are pointed to the ultimate promise of God. Today, our eyes are turned toward heaven. Today, we remember those who have gone before us and give thanks that by grace through faith in Christ's righteousness, we stand with them as forgiven sinners and holy saints. On this day we proclaim that in all generations, God has led His people; that in all generations, God has forgiven His people; and that in all generations, God has given His people life. It has been said that God gives eternal gifts to temporal people. And, it's also important to say that these gifts are given in tangible ways and in physical places, and that is why the dedication of our school matters.

In the Augsburg Confession, the leaders of the Reformation made a bold statement about the purpose of the Church: “The Church” they wrote, “is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered” (Article VII). This simple definition is important because in our age the Church has been saddled with demands and distractions that completely cloud this purpose. Churches have become everything from social centers to self-help clinics and while faith is always lived out in arenas that intersect with life, the purpose of the church is not to help us perfect our behavior in this life. The purpose of the church is not to mobilize people for social causes. The purpose of the church is not to serve as a conduit for the culture. No, the purpose of the church is unique because the Church is the place where God's temporal people gather to receive His eternal gifts.

It's a place where broken hearts are mended. It's a place where the spiritually sick find healing. It's a place where sinners are forgiven. It is the place where heaven and earth meet. My friends, these are the gifts that Christ brings to us. This is where Christ comes to us. And this is where God helps us. These are the things that define the purpose of the Church and with such life-changing and eternal stakes, do you know what our founders did before even one brick of this sanctuary was laid? They started a school.

Occupying a building that sat on the northwest corner of our property, the first members of Emmanuel Lutheran Church brought their children to Emmanuel Lutheran School not only to be versed in the temporal disciplines associated with reading, writing, and arithmetic but also because the first-generation members of Emmanuel understood that God had called them to provide education for life and faith for eternity. And in each new generation, this commitment to Christian Education has been renewed.

In the 1930s, when the school was struggling to survive and the question of closing our doors came before the congregation, the members of Emmanuel doubled down on their mission and instead of closing the school, they bought a school bus to bring in children from a growing suburban base. And, in 1962, Emmanuel and St. Michael congregations stepped out in pioneering fashion as the two congregations voted to partner in a Lutheran school ministry that has become a model of collaboration. And, when space constraints limited the scope of ESM's reach, the congregations acted again to develop their campuses, and in 2002, the school ministry expanded by moving our Kindergarten, first, and second-grade classes to

St. Michael's Getz Road campus creating space for more children to be included in the school ministry. Today, by God's grace, the ministry of Emmanuel-St. Michael Lutheran School serves 448 children and the reach of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through our school has extended far beyond the imagination of our founders.

When I was a seminary student I took a course that helped to shape my understanding of the unique purpose of the Church. In this class, we studied the theology and history of worship. This class covered every aspect of what happens during worship from the prelude to the closing hymn, and as we talked about the Sacrament of the Altar, we examined the liturgy and prayers that prepare the congregation for Communion. These were words I had heard hundreds of times before and I could recite most of them from memory and yet, as we studied this liturgy, things became clear to me for the first time, and the most dramatic revelation came as we studied a portion of the communion liturgy called the Proper Preface. The Proper Preface is probably more familiar to you than you know. It always begins with the pastor saying, "It is truly good right and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God..." Then, as the Proper Preface draws to a close, we hear these words, "Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying..." and then the congregation joins in singing the Sanctus: "Holy, Holy, Holy..."

Our professor, Arthur Just, explained that this familiar liturgy speaks about an amazing reality that Christ creates in Holy Communion and that when we come to the altar to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, we are also gathered together with the entire Church – and not just the people sitting next us in the pew, but every believer of every generation – "with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven..." With fellow believers in all generations, we are together in the presence of Jesus. Dr. Just says it best in his own words when he writes, "What we must always remember when we go to the Lord's Supper is that we commune with Christ and wherever Christ is, there is heaven. And this communion includes all the saints who have died and risen in Christ: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Ruth, Peter, Paul, our grandparents, and great-grandparents – perhaps even our spouses or our children – and all the saints now living all over the world, and those still to come... In Christ, in that great mystery of our union with Him, we are joined to all who are joined to Him"<sup>1</sup>

"Education for Life. Faith for Eternity." This is the motto of Emmanuel-St. Michael Lutheran School. And, every day, through our school ministry, students receive information that gives them the knowledge they will need to make a meaningful difference in this world. But more important than this temporal function, our school exists to proclaim God's saving action and the truth that through Christ Jesus, they have been redeemed, that they have been forgiven, and that they have been given an eternal home that nothing in this temporal world can ever touch or change. The ministry of Emmanuel-St. Michael Lutheran School matters because here, in His Word, Christ is present. Here, God calls His people to faith. Here, broken hearts are mended, spiritual sickness is healed, and heaven and earth meet. Today, we can together rejoice because in Christ Jesus we are forgiven sinners and we are holy people, and, on this Day of All Saints, we can cry out with angels and archangels and the company of heaven in all generations and today we can thank God for the eternal gifts by which we have been saved. Go with the peace of this promise God has made to you today. And all God's people said, "Amen."

Pastor Thomas A. Eggold

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur A. Just Jr., *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service* (St. Louis: CPH, 2008), 212-213.