

November/December 2025

# THE VINE



*Pastor Kris' Chronicles*

## ***Advent—Hope, Hunger, and SNAP***

November 30 is the first Sunday in Advent. It's also the Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend.

The Spirituality page of this edition has some ideas for some gratitude practices in recognition of Thanksgiving. Check out Virg's suggestion and the one I added. I'm going to try to do a daily gratitude post using Virg's alphabet suggestion. Feel free to join! Gratitude is a great way to ground ourselves in God's blessings as we prepare for Advent.

In non-religious terms, Advent means the beginning of something—for example, the advent of the digital age.

In faith terms, that's not a bad definition either. To be on the advent of something is to be on the cusp of something altogether new. Christ's incarnation into the world was an altogether new thing for God to do. But Christ's birth already happened and yet we still observe Advent.

What we have been on the advent of ever since Christ's birth is the return of Christ and the fulfilment of the promised Kingdom of God. In that sense, we are always in Advent.

As we prepare to celebrate Christ's birth, we also wait in hope for the day when Christ's work to renew all of creation will be complete. Advent is a time of preparation for that day. Advent used to be more of a penitential season—a time of repentance to prepare for Christ's return. That's still appropriate, but it seems the season has become more one of expectant and hopeful waiting.

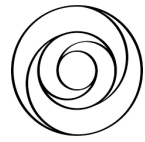
Where do we find hope? Obviously, the big answer for us as Christians is that we find hope in Christ's defeat of evil and death on the cross. It assures us that the promised day of fulfillment is already won.

But sometimes it takes little glimpses of hope to keep us grounded in that big hope—little glimpses of God's kingdom unfolding in the here and now. Where are you seeing that?

Leaving aside any partisan opinion, the political maneuverings of both parties means the payment of SNAP benefits—the food benefits for low income people—has been stopped. I'm finding hope in the many social media posts and news reports I see of people helping to provide food to the Food Banks and feeding programs. I see hope in the stocking of Little Free Pantries, including the one at Bethlehem in Davey. I see hope in the Wahoo Christmas Concert that will raise money for the Saunders County Food Pantry and the rent assistance program. I see hope in businesses and restaurants offering free meals.

I see hope in all those places where people are inspired to help neighbors in need.

And the coolest thing of all? That's how we can BE hope as well. Advent is a time to focus on our faith practices and our relationship with God...to see the hope in God's story. But it's also a time to BE hope for a world that desperately needs it.



## Seeking the Spirit—by Virg Unverferth

### Gratitude ABC's

November and December are two months where people generally feel grateful for what they have. You can feel gratitude for your family, your health, your abilities, meeting of your general needs, a good job or caring people in your life. We often get busy with life and forget to give thanks for the basic things or things that aren't as bad as they could be. You can give thanks that you got out of bed, that you aren't in the hospital for treatment of a chronic ailment, you have a hot meal for supper or getting assistance from others for food, that the low pressure light on your car hasn't come on for awhile or that you were able to get your tomatoes picked before the frost. I like doing Gratitude ABC's especially when I'm feeling down or stressed. A: apples from our tree, B: rolling a ball to my granddaughter, C: corn harvest D: dedicated members of my care team, etc. Q, X, and Z can be hard, but Quietness, Xylophones, and Zebras work well. Sharing what we are grateful for with God in this type of contemplative praying can be done at any time. You can do it with your spouse while walking or eating a meal together. You can do it while you are doing a craft or just sitting.

**It's hard to be negative when you find things, no matter how small, to be thankful for.**

---

Virg Unverferth is involved in the Seeking the Spirit Within through the Nebraska Synod of the ELCA. She is participating in a three year course to become a spiritual director. Spiritual Directors meet with folks to help them discern the Holy Spirit's presence and call within them. She offers these each newsletter to help you connect with the Spirit in and around you.

Pastor Kris here—a few years ago around this time I was kind of depressed and found myself getting too sucked into Facebook and Instagram—where it seemed like life was supposed to be all about jumping from one exciting Instagram worthy event after another...and my life wasn't like that. So I spent about a month posting photos of very ordinary things for which I was grateful...my YMCA, my favorite tea, my dog, leftovers, and so on. It was probably one of the most helpful gratitude practices I've found. This year I might do that only use the alphabet. Feel free to join me!

## *The Digital World*

Over the last month, I've been working on getting our combined website set up. I met with Mike Unverferth and we evaluated the different websites. For a variety of reasons, we ended up going with what was originally set up as Bethlehem's site.

I've got a fairly rough version set up and invite feedback. The new URL for the website is <https://www.vine4.org/>

Please take a look and offer any feedback you might have.

Once we have it the way we want it, the final step will be to redirect the domain names for Grace and Zion to this one. Bethlehem's already is.

Bethlehem, Grace and Zion all have Facebook pages. There's not much to lose from having a Facebook page and I'd like to explore the possibility of setting one up for Czech Presbyterian as well.

Bethlehem, Grace and Zion all have the ability to livestream worship to Facebook. Bethlehem is working on a relatively inexpensive upgrade on their AV equipment to enable better quality streaming to YouTube.

Once all of that is set up, I'd like to assemble a tech team to help with the ongoing maintenance and updating of the website and Facebook pages. We also need a bit larger pool of folks willing to take care of the worship livestreams.

Having a digital presence isn't the end-all and be-all for rescuing small, declining congregations. But they're a relatively easy and inexpensive outreach tool. In this day and age, it just doesn't make sense to not have at least something of a digital presence.

In the last edition of The Vine there was a short article about the election of Bishop Yehiel Curry to be the presiding bishop for the ELCA and a brief description of the ELCA's governance. This month the Nebraska Synod is highlighted.

The ELCA is divided in 65 synods. They are based on population of ELCA Lutherans. So in some places—like Minnesota—there are lots of synods just in that state. Nebraska is one synod, and some synods are made up of more than one state.

The synods of the ELCA are primarily seen as a resource that empowers congregations in their own mission. For example, the Nebraska Synod offers a variety of training and equipping classes for lay preachers; classes for those who want to go deeper in their faith; a spiritual direction program; and the Vitality Initiative which helps congregations discern their future. They also offer a Parish Ministry Associate course for those who want to serve as spiritual leaders in a parish.

In addition, the Nebraska Synod supports several ministries in the state. They are:

- Seeking the Spirit Within—training for spiritual directors
- Followers of Christ Prison Ministry
- Iglesia Luterana San Andres in Omaha
- The Lakota Lutheran Center and Chapel
- Sudanese Outreach
- Barnabas Community for people in the Belmont area of Lincoln.

In addition, the Synod partners with several other Serving Arms to carry out the mission of the gospel:

- Lutheran Giving
- Immanuel Communities
- Blue Valley Lutheran Homes
- Nebraska Lutheran Outdoor Ministries
- Lutheran Campus Ministries
- Oaks Indian Mission in Oklahoma
- Lutheran Family Services
- Mosaic—services for developmentally disabled
- Midland University
- Tabitha
- Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago
- Wartburg Seminar, Decorah, IA
- Table Grace Café, Omaha

Support for the ministries of our Nebraska Synod and the ELCA come from Mission Share, given by congregations.

Bishop Scott Johnson is the bishop of the Nebraska Synod.

Decisions that affect the Synod as a whole are made by delegates at the Synod Assembly held each summer in Kearney.

**Next time**—I'll delve into a bit of learning about Presbyterians.

## Advent schedule

Advent starts on November 30. This is also a 5th Sunday so we will have a joint worship at Czech Presbyterian, County Rd 21 and County Road I. We'll have coffee and fellowship at 9:30 and worship at 10:30.

Advent midweek services will be on Wednesdays at Grace at 6:30 pm. Light meal with Holden Evening Prayer service with a short interactive message. All are invited!

## Important information

Pastor Kris: phone 402-499-4993; krisbo90@gmail.com

Online worship info:

Bethlehem Facebook livestream <https://www.facebook.com/bethlehemdavey>

Zion Facebook livestream <https://www.facebook.com/ZionIthaca>

Grace Facebook livestream <https://www.facebook.com/gracelutheranwahoo>

**Website:** <https://www.vine4.org/> This is now the combined website for all four congregations. Bethlehem's old URL now directs to this.

The websites for Grace and Zion are currently still operational with the following URLs

<https://www.zionithaca.org/>

<https://www.gracelutheranswedeburg.com>

The website is still under construction, but usable. I will soon get the URL for Grace and Zion redirected to the common website.

## Newsletter submissions

Newsletters will be bimonthly and I try to have them ready by the first of the month. **I would encourage you to submit items for the newsletter—events, thoughts, pictures, and so on.**