

May/June 2026

THE VINE



Pastor Kris' Chronicles

Death and Life



Spring is a reminder that new life – resurrection – is all around us. Early blooming flowers poke their leaves up through the surface of the earth, sometimes even through snow. Bright blossoms seem to lift some of the dreariness of late winter. Trees begin to bud. In carefully manicured gardens and flowerbeds, the transformation from death to life seems very neat and ordered.

In the natural world, not so much. Wayne Park in Waverly has a large area and a couple smaller areas designated as an arboretum. There's a wide variety of trees and native flowers and grasses. The management philosophy of these areas is to mostly let them be wild. They go through their natural cycle just as they would in a natural forest.

We have someone in our neighborhood who does the same thing with areas of native plantings in his yard.

What's striking is that in late winter and early spring, those areas do not look very attractive by our traditional manicured lawn standards. The old growth from last year stands there all brown and straggly and dead looking. For some it's got to be tempting to get in there and cut it all back to the ground and rake it smooth. But if you leave it, nature does its thing and gradually it comes to life.

In the natural world, there's a period of time in the early spring where both death and life are found right next to each other.

Christ's resurrection is a sure promise that resurrection is for all of us and for all of creation. It's a pattern written in the stardust and the world of nature. It's a pattern written over and over throughout the Old Testament.

I don't know what will happen to the life cycle of plants when God's new creation is complete and heaven and earth become one. But what I know for sure now is that life and death occupy the same space.

Just as green new life and brown old growth occupy the same forest floor, we live with the daily presence of death. We can't ignore it. We can grieve what's come and gone and celebrate it for the fertile ground it leaves for the future. We grieve the people we have lost but also celebrate the legacy they have left. We trust in resurrection and look for signs of it...not just after we die, but now.

Today is Earth Day. Friday is Arbor Day. This season, celebrate the cycles of nature. Get out and look for signs of life coming out of death. Plant a tree... or a garden...or a corn field. Love the earth the way you love the people you love most...love the earth the way you love God. Because in the heart of this cycle of death and resurrection lies the very soul of God.



Mike Unverferth from Bethlehem serves as the “Corridor Cluster” representative on the Nebraska Synod Council. The Synod Council functions as the board of directors for the synod similar to how each local congregation has its own council. And for those serving on your council, if you did not know before that you are the board of directors, you do now. We meet four times per year, and meetings are generally more formalized than our

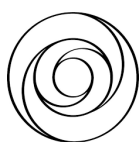
local council ones due to the number of people and to ensure we are following constitutional requirements. There are about 24 council members including one from each of the 16 clusters along with several at-large members and synod officers including the Bishop, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer.

Most of the work is fairly routine, including receiving reports from the Bishop, Secretary, Treasurer. At the recent April meeting, we had a couple of actions related to the 2026 Synod Assembly to be held at the end of May. First we reviewed and approved the proposed budget for the 2027 fiscal year. The actual budget is voted on at Synod Assembly, and can be amended at that time, though that rarely happens. Second, we approved the proposed rules for how the Synod Assembly operates, including specific dates for when resolutions have to be submitted, voting requirements for passage, time limits for debate, and so on. These do not generally change from year to year except for the dates, but we still have to formally propose the rules, which then get adopted at the Assembly.

At the April meeting we also heard a report from the directors of Seeking the Spirit Within, which is responsible for training new Spiritual Directors. This program was restarted three years ago and the Council was updated on progress toward sustainability related to number of new students, funding needs, and plans for the future under different scenarios. Over the past several years, StSW has received grants to help support the program and they had been asked to update us on how the money is being used.

At our next meeting, which is held on the day before Synod Assembly, the main Council activity will be electing people who were nominated to serve on various other Synod committees. We will also review any resolutions that have been submitted for Assembly consideration to make a recommendation for whether to approve or not.

Seeking the Spirit by Virg Unverferth



Matthew 6: 19-21 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also.”

We all know that we can’t take any of our “stuff” with us, but we still like to focus on getting more of it until we finally realize that we’re getting older and have too much of it! The better place to store things may be in our heart and soul. In order to do this, it is important to keep our heart and soul open to give and to receive.

Open to give to others as needed. Openness may include donating needed items, support for a homeless center or food kitchen, unconditional love, acceptance of someone different than us, prayers, visits or phone calls, a comforting hug, a warm smile.

Open to receive from others. Often this can be the hardest to do. We must be open to receive help from others as we age, recover from an illness or ease a burden we are carrying. Open to receive unconditional love and acceptance when we feel shame or embarrassment. Open to being the recipient of prayers, visits or phone calls when we are struggling. Open to truly feeling the comfort from a hug or the warmth of a smile.

When we fully open our heart and soul, we are fully open to God and God’s presence in our lives.

On May 17 during worship at Bethlehem, Virg will be commissioned as a Spiritual Director in the Nebraska Synod. Congratulations Virg and blessings as you begin this new way to serve!

Confirmation/Kids' Ministry

In order to confirm the four boys at Zion before I retire, we started confirmation during Lent and will work out a schedule so we can hold their Affirmation of Baptism service next May. Here are a couple photos from my first post-Lent meeting with them. Part of our time was spent on a service project—painting rocks for the art snake at Liberty House in Wahoo where I lead worship once a month.



Children's Ministry

Between Grace and Zion, right now there are at least 8 children 5 and under. In the next several months, I'm planning to gather those families and talk a bit about what children's ministry in this shared ministry might look like in the future.

Ministry Teams

In our last meeting with our Synod Bishop's assistant, Amy Woods, she recommended getting several teams operating in preparation for the next chapter in the life of our shared ministry. We have the preaching/worship leadership group up and running. The tech team is meeting April 26.

Amy also suggested a spiritual care team for visitation in homes, nursing homes, and hospital. All four congregations do a good job of keeping each other informed and taking care of each other. A team is probably overkill for the numbers but having someone to contact besides me will be important going forward. I'm still working on this but at Bethlehem Virg Unverferth is a contact person and at Grace Allan and Judy Pearson are. They would be available for any visits or extra prayers that might be needed. They will also have the contact information for a pastor who will cover for major events—funerals mainly—when I'm on vacation. I'll also make sure Don and Judy have that information for Czech Pres. I plan to identify a contact at Zion as well so that all four have their own point of contact.

We'll also put together a worship planning team.

If you are interested in any of these and haven't let me know, please shoot me a message or give me a call.

Pastor Kris will be on vacation June 21—25. I'm still working on the entirety of our care team, but at a minimum Virg Unverferth will have the info for the pastor who will be covering should one be needed. Her number is 402-326-0122.

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/Zionlthaca>

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

Website: <https://www.vine4.org/>

Regular Sunday Worship Times

Bethlehem Lutheran—10:30 am—communion first and third Sundays

Czech Presbyterian—10:30 am—There will be no worship on the third Sundays from Easter to the beginning of Advent.

Grace Lutheran—9:00 am—communion second and fourth Sundays September—May; Second Sunday during the summer

Zion Lutheran—9:00 am—communion first Sundays

Pastor Kris preaches at Bethlehem and Zion the first and third Sundays and Grace and Czech Presbyterian the second and fourth Sundays. Fifth Sundays are a joint worship.

May 31 is the next 5th Sunday. We will worship jointly at Czech Presbyterian that day.

Preachers for May/June

May 3—Grace/CP—Kevin Whitcomb; B/Z—Pr. Kris

May 10—G/CP—Pr. Kris; B/Z—Curtis Olson

May 17—G—Kevin; B/Z—Pr. Kris

May 24—G/CP—Pr. Kris; B/Z—Open

June 7—G/CP—Miranda Kliment; B/Z—Pr. Kris

June 14—G/CP—Pr. Kris; B/Z—Annie Mumgaard

June 21—G—Kevin Whitcomb; B/Z—Virg Unverferth

June 28—G/CP—Pr. Kris; B/Z—Open