

July-August 2018

Luke 4:14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

We learn lessons a number of ways. My vicar year in Michigan left an impression the first day. The door I tried to use was locked. It had a sign that was peeling back that (if it could be read) said to go to another door where the secretary buzzes you in. Instead, I had a sign I could not read, faded from being in the sun for years, and a door that left me initially confused where to go. Inside, a bulletin board had information that had not been touched for some time. Some items looked like it had been there better than a decade. There were pictures of an event that had no meaning to me of a pig carcass. The men's toilet required 'extra effort' since "one flush was never enough." What impression do you think that left?

"First impressions" are critical in business, in life, and **YES** also in the church. People assess Faith United **WELL BEFORE** they step inside the door. I wish it were different, but we get one chance to make a "good impression." The church cannot afford to look like it is in a time warp with posters for events from February. Visitors made a choice come that Sunday or for an event.

Why does this have my attention? On vacation I attended a much larger Lutheran church. I've been there before. They worship about 300-400 on a Sunday...in the summer. They have two (2) pastors. Their facilities are well appointed. Yet, you know what struck me—not a person greeted me. The person who gave me the bulletin was the closest I got to feeling like someone cared I was there. I got their attention at the 'sharing of peace' by walking around to people. Not surprisingly, I was the last one to take my seat. I purposely sat to listen to the postlude (and, yes, I was near the back of the church) to see if anyone would stop. None did. One fellow did give me a 'good morning' as he walked by. As the last person leaving the church, I introduced myself to the pastor. I shared with him that not a person greeted me in any meaningful way. None asked my name nor why I came. As Lutherans, I expect the people at the 8:00 AM service always attend 8:00 AM and sit where they always sit. I should have stood out like a sore thumb. I could see from their faces that my walking around to share the peace was unexpected.

Such experiences teach important lessons. It might be useful to send out three (3) teams of people to more distant Lutheran churches to see how they greet people. Is there hospitality? Do you feel glad you attended? Saying that, would those same people walk into our church and see if "familiarity" brings a better result. It is not just first impressions, but continued care that forms how people feel about FUEL.

I say this knowing that September will come far too quickly. I am starting to transition things. Someone needs to file the Food Bank report. Banners need changed. Outside flags should change every four-five (4-5) weeks. The cross (ramp door entry) has a central picture that changes. (Did you know that?) Help is needed for the newsletter picture page. Could I get a few people who will do these small roles that keep us fresh, to our guests AND to our church family. **I am asking for help**, but also a chance to be aware of what people experience. There is still another three (3) months. Can I (and will I) still do these things? Yes, but...a big BUT...will you see the church differently if you take one of these tasks? I think so; that's why I'm inviting you to be the one leaving the impression.

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

With blessings, Pastor Joe