

SHARING  
GOD'S  
LOVE

# SHEPHERD'S STAFF

SHEPHERD OF THE VALLEY LUTHERAN CHURCH  
A member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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## DISCERNING GOD'S RESOLUTIONS

A new year brings new possibilities and new beginnings. Sometimes we express those in terms of *resolutions*, as if turning to that first page of a new calendar means a clean slate for becoming the person I've always wanted to be. And sometimes it turns out that way. But I must confess that I usually resemble those people who drive gym attendance way up in January before it comes back to normal in February. The calendar may have changed, but my resolve, my will-power hasn't.

But what about God's "resolutions" this year? The easy part of our new year's resolutions is making them. In contrast, we pray "Thy will be done" all the time, trusting that God always keeps God's promises—we just don't always know God's will, God's resolutions *for us*. What if this January we spent more time thinking about God's resolutions in our lives?

There's a word for thinking about God's will: *discernment*. Especially as someone who came recently to a vocation in the church, I've heard the word "discernment" thrown around a lot. The ELCA's unofficial book for people considering ministry is subtitled "Discerning God's Call to Ministry." I have heard everyone from church councils to those taking the next steps after a job loss to engage in a "process of discernment" as they consider the future. Sometimes the word comes with a description, but often, it seems, understanding what is meant by "discernment" is left to the reader or hearer. Moreover, unlike many other "churchy" words like "righteousness," "discernment" does not correspond to a particular word in the original languages of scripture. So what does discernment mean? And what *should* it mean for us?

Perhaps "discernment" has become a popular word simply because it is better than the alternatives. Since it seems to refer to a reality or a will beyond our own, it is not mere "decision-making." Nor is it "divination," as though discernment were a supernatural trick to reveal hidden things with clear certainty. Talking about "discernment" seems to capture our situation of wanting to listen to the will of God, but feeling uncertain about what that is. Even if we use the right word, forgetting the sense it carries of listening amid uncertainty puts us at risk of mistaking our own desires for God's will.

But is uncertainty about God's will really our biggest problem when it comes to discernment? Often discernment is most called for in the midst of tumultuous times in our lives, whether those times involve considering new directions for a congregation, new career paths, or treatment options for a terminal illness. Especially in such times, the question of God's will is not just about knowledge or uncertainty: it is about fear and trust. When I wonder what God's will for me might be, it is never a matter of idle curiosity; ultimately, it is a matter of meaning or emptiness, of joy or despair, of life or death. In these times, especially when God seems absent, the questions of our hearts may sound less like pious talk of "discernment" and more like the words of psalms: "How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever?" (Psalm 89:46); "Do not forsake me, O LORD; O my God, do not be far from me" (Psalm 38:21).

Continued

(Pastor's column continued)

The object of our discernment is finally, then, not God's will, as though knowing that will were the chief obstacle to obeying it. Rather, our discernment is of our relationship with God. God's will is your salvation and life in your crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ, love incarnate. In the uncertain, fearful places in your life, do you trust your Lord to lead you, as a popular prayer puts it, "to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown"? Can we trust Christ to lead us out of our "comfort zone" and transform us? In the end, as Paul suggests to the Romans, true discernment begins not with us figuring out *God's* will, but with God transforming *us* in faith: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God— what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). That's a resolution we can give thanks for year-round.

### † IN OUR PRAYERS †

Nevagay Abel, Kelsey Dolan, Lois Johnson, Sam Horvath, Don Abel, Kevin Persaud, Mary Ann Hopper, Doris Kampfe, Marilyn Kloweit, Keith Talmadge, Lisa Jones, Dan Webber (friend of Bruce Solko), Marge Rhodes (friend of Don & Neva Abel), David Johnson (nephew of Dyvone Freburg), Mildred Anderson (mother of Cheryl Erdmann), Robert Kibble (brother of Vee Kerley), Pastor Paul Garchow (friend of the Lund family), Barb Rose, & Julaine Lofquist-Birch (Jerry Lofquist's sisters) Barb Schafer (friend of Phil & Susie Smalley), Carl Every (friend of Susie Smalley), Pastor Jeffrey Butz (nephew of Don & Neva Abel), Brian Lyngaas (friend of Rhoda Fox), Glenn & Harold Peterson (brother & father of LaVon Downing), Tom Hoffman (brother of Stu Hoffman), Myron & Jean Peterson (Mary Alice Peterson's parents), the people of Tamil Nadu & Pondicherry, India, and our homebound church members.

(Please review this list and let either Pastor Scott or the church office know when a name can be removed).

### THANK YOU'S

**Thank you** to our members who led Thrivent Action Teams and procured \$250.00 from Thrivent Financial for fundraisers and/or service projects for Shepherd of the Valley in 2015.

- Dennis Scheider – purchased \$250.00 of peanut butter for Salvation Army Food Drive
- Sherry Scheider - purchased \$250.00 of fleece material for Rock House Kids Blankets
- Myrna Hagemann - \$250.00 purchased for our youth's Parents Night Out fundraiser: pizza, soda, chips, gingerbread house supplies (graham crackers, frosting, and candy) and remaining monies given to the youth fundraiser towards a flat screen TV.
- Matthew Brindle - applied \$250.00 towards an Automated External Defibrillator (AED).
- Don Brindle - purchased \$250.00 of socks for Ann Honer's Warm Socks Mission.
- Kay Brindle - purchased \$250.00 of backpacks and school supplies for Lutheran World Relief School Bags.

**Thank you** to those who purchased, cut, and tied fleece especially Carol, Lois, Annette, Kay, Myrna, Denise, Ruth, Don, Chad, Melanie, Sue, Sherry, Sarah, Linda, Ann, Bob and Kris. Thank you also to Dola Gregory, founder and Executive Director of Rock House Kids. We increased our donation of blankets to 40 fleece blankets with the help of Sherry Scheider leading a Thrivent Action Team for this service project.

**Thank you** to the following faithful worship bulletin assemblers and newsletter assemblers: Linda Longardner, Linda DeGroff, Ron Hunt, Sherry Scheider, Carol Dahl, and Kay Brindle.




**LYO**  
**SKI TRIP**  
Jr. High & High School  
**January 18, 2016**  
*Chestnut Mountain Resort*  
Galena, IL  
**9am-9pm**

**Cost**  
\$45 - Lift, Lesson, Rental  
Ski or Snowboard  
\$25 - Lift Ticket Only  
\$8 - Meal Deal  
Voucher worth \$10

**Register Online**  
[www.ChestnutMtn.com](http://www.ChestnutMtn.com)  
• Click Rates & Passes  
• Then Group Booking  
• Book Group Reservations  
Enter group name as:  
NIS Your Church  
**Questions?**  
Call Audrey 815-732-2220

**ANNUAL MEETING NOTICE**

The annual meeting of Shepherd of the Valley will be held Sunday, January 31, 2016, after the worship service. We will be electing council members, approving the 2016 budget, and reviewing the year 2015. It's been a very busy year.

**Plan on attending. Your input is necessary.**

 **Senior News**

There will be no Senior gathering in January.

**GOOD NEWS BIBLES**  
**OLD "GREEN" HYMNALS**  
**FREE**

**ON THE TABLE IN THE NARTHEX**  
**HELP YOURSELF**

**LIBRARY NEWS**



There will be no Library work day in January.

**COMMITMENT CARDS**

If you haven't turned in your commitment card please bring it to church and place it in the offering plate or drop it off in the church office. We're working on the budget and need to have an accurate idea of what our income will be for 2016. Thank you.



December 8, 2015

Dear Friends in Christ,

As you know, Bishop Wollersheim will be retiring August 31, 2016. We plan to honor Bishop Gary at our Synod Assembly thanking him for the 18 great years of leadership as bishop in the Northern Illinois Synod.

One of the ways we wish to honor and say "thank you" to Bishop Gary and Polly is by establishing two ongoing ministry funds in their names. To this end, we have renamed the "Rostered Leaders Debt Retirement Fund" the "Gary Wollersheim Rostered Leaders Educational Debt Retirement Fund," and have established a new fund, the "Polly Wollersheim Fund for Literacy Education - Arcot Lutheran Church, India," to help increase literacy in our Companion Synod. With this letter, you will find a description of the two funds sharing how they can make a difference and have a lasting impact in our Northern Illinois Synod and globally in the Arcot Lutheran Church, India. Making a gift to one or both of these funds would be a wonderful way to say "thank you" to the Wollersheims for their many years of service in the church and specifically in our Northern Illinois Synod.

There are a number of different ways that you and your congregation can participate in sharing a gift to these funds.

- You can spread the news of the two funds as a thank you to the Wollersheims inviting individual gifts from people in your congregation.
- A Sunday could be designated when gifts can be received to provide a congregational gift to the funds.
- If your congregation has an endowment fund, a portion of the interest might be designated for the funds.
- The Advent or Lenten offering could be designated for your congregational gift.
- The celebration of congregational anniversaries can also be a time to share a special gift to one or both of these important funds.

Whichever way or combination of ways for receiving gifts works for your congregation, the gifts you share will be a wonderful way to leave a meaningful legacy to the faithfulness and leadership of Bishop Gary and Polly. Please know, too, that these funds will be ongoing and gifts can be received for these funds at any time beginning now and well into the future.

We will be receiving gifts for these funds at the synod office. When you send your gift, please designate which fund and the amount for each. We will announce the gifts total to date for each fund at our Synod Assembly in June.

Thank you for your prayerful consideration of this lasting way to acknowledge the faithful leadership of Bishop Wollersheim and to say thank you for his faithful service to Christ and the Church over these many years.

In Christ,  
William Bartlett,  
Vice President, Northern Illinois Synod



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## RETURN SERVICES REQUESTED

### Office Hours

Monday—Thursday  
8:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m.

### 2015 Church Council

Kay Brindle, Outreach  
Carol Dahl, Financial Secretary  
Janette Erickson, Vice President &  
Fellowship

Chad Farris, Property  
Amy Kellogg, Youth Ministry  
Lena Lund, Youth Representative  
Robert Maness, Finance  
Vicki Nitz, Preschool  
Laurie Pellant, Social Ministry  
Sally Schrader, Christian Education  
Phil Smalley, Treasurer  
Bruce Solko, Personnel  
Bev Wacker, Worship/Music  
John Wolf, Stewardship  
Terri Woodcock, Secretary

### Staff

The Rev. Scott Benolkin, Pastor  
Judi Fields, Secretary  
Linda Longardner, Organist  
Phil Smalley, Treasurer  
Susie Smalley, Music Director  
Diane Kirkland, Bell Director  
Patte Lund, Christian Education.  
Carol Dahl, Financial Secretary  
Anita Ralston, Custodian

