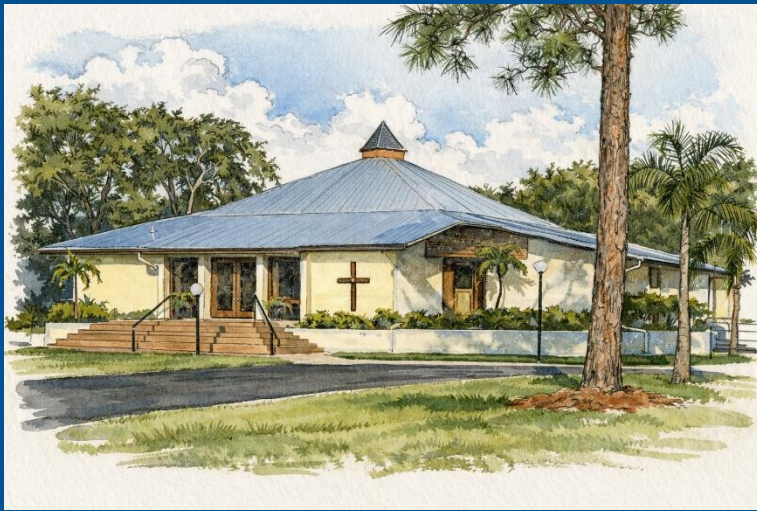




July 2026

From the Pastor's Desk

Dear church family,

July invites us to think about freedom. As our nation celebrates its 250th anniversary, we give thanks to God for the many blessings we enjoy.

We are grateful for the freedoms that allow us to gather for worship, speak openly about our faith, gift Bibles, and even serve our neighbors. These are gifts worth cherishing and protecting. At the same time, our faith reminds us that there is a freedom no nation can grant and no government can take away.

On the first Sunday of this month, the lectionary brings us to a passage in which the Apostle Paul honestly describes the struggle that lives within every believer: "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:19). In a simpler way, have you ever thought, said, or done something you knew was wrong, only to ask yourself later, "Why do I keep doing this when I know better?" If so, you are not alone. I surely asked myself that more than once.

What is refreshing about this passage is the fact that even the great apostle wrestled with that same question. In Romans 7, Paul does not pretend that following Christ makes every temptation disappear or every decision easy. He knew the tension between the life he desired to live and the choices he sometimes found himself making.

Several centuries later, Martin Luther captured this reality with a simple Latin phrase: *Simul justus et peccator*, meaning “at the same time righteous and a sinner.” It may sound like a contradiction, but it describes the Christian life remarkably well.

Luther meant that through Christ, God declares us righteous. We are forgiven. We are adopted into God's family. We belong to Christ completely. Yet we still wrestle with old habits, selfishness, fear, pride, impatience, and doubt.

Until Christ makes all things new, both realities remain true. That is why we do not have to hide our struggles from God or from one another. We do not have to pretend we have everything together. Our hope has never rested on our ability to achieve perfection. Our hope rests on the faithfulness of Christ.

Paul ends this part of his letter with gratitude instead of despair: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” That is where our confidence lies. The struggle is real, but it does not have the final word. Grace does.

As we move through this summer month, may we celebrate every good gift with thankful hearts. May we cherish the freedoms we enjoy as citizens while remembering the greater freedom we have received in Christ: the freedom to confess our sins without fear, receive God's mercy with joy, and live each day trusting that the One who has begun a good work in us will continue to shape us into the likeness of Christ.

Whether we are traveling, spending time with family, or gathering for worship each Sunday, we remain one family in Christ. We continue to gather around the Holy Table, encouraging one another as fellow travelers who – despite continuing to be sinners – by God's grace, are renewed and held securely in Christ.

God bless you and your family.

Yours truly,

Rev. Syl Estevez
Designated Interim-Pastor

Faith's Happenings ...
July, 2026

Mark Your Calendars...

Saturday, July 4	• Independance Day
Sunday, July 5	• 10:15 am - Morning Coffee • 10:45 am - Divine Service (<i>Gottesdienst</i>)
Tuesday, July 7	• 8:30 am - “Maintaining Faith” Work Crew • 9:00 am - “Lutheran Chicks” Workshop
Sunday, July 12	• 10:15 am - Morning Coffee • 10:45 am - Divine Service (<i>Gottesdienst</i>)
Tuesday, July 14	• 8:30 am - “Maintaining Faith” Work Crew • 9:00 am - “Lutheran Chicks” Workshop
Sunday, July 19	• 10:15 am - Morning Coffee • 10:45 am - Divine Service (<i>Gottesdienst</i>)

Tuesday, July 21	• 8:30 am - “Maintaining Faith” Work Crew • 9:00 am - “Lutheran Chicks” Workshop
Sunday, July 26	• 10:15 am - Morning Coffee • 10:45 am - Divine Service (<i>Gottesdienst</i>)
Tuesday, July 28	• 8:30 am - “Maintaining Faith” Work Crew • 9:00 am - “Lutheran Chicks” Workshop

Last Month's Recap

Synod Annual Assembly



Jim and Debby Porter had the privilege of representing our church at this 3-day event, gathering Lutherans from around the Florida-Bahamas Synod. Opening and closing worship were wonderful times with an attendance of over 400, lots of joyful music, and a full liturgy with communion. Pastor Syl was invited to take an active role in both services.

There were three plenary sessions. The business activities were mundane and noncontroversial. Many short informational videos reported the activities of the organizations supported by our Synod. The keynote speaker was a representative from “Fresh Expressions,” and she spoke of ways to worship and witness outside of the “normal” worship space. Our congregation was honored for being an “All-Star” for meeting our monetary commitment to the Synod and ELCA. Pastor Carl Kelly was honored for his many years of ordination, although he was not in attendance this year.

There were also two workshop sessions. Jim, as treasurer, attended one on budget planning. The emphasis was on doing mission and then budgeting for that mission rather than the other way around. The second session he attended was on church bookkeeping, since accounting is always a struggle for many churches.

Debby and Pastor Syl attended the “Just Love” workshop led by two Lutheran Pastors from Minneapolis, who presented the struggles they faced with their members during the ICE raids and protests there this winter. The second session she attended was on our Global Mission partners.

A highlight of the assembly was the time to meet and network with other people in our conference and Synod. It is good to see how our congregation is a part of the bigger picture of God's Work, Our Hands in Florida, the USA, and the world.



Faith's Camper Ministry

Faith has been reaching out to many of the local homeless population through its "Camper Ministry" for over 8 years. Originally, it was the brainchild of Linda Schultz, who connected with the people running the outreach at Indian Mound Park via the Project Phoenix thrift store. She and her sister visited the shop to make a donation and ended up learning about the outreach to local homeless people, whom Phoenix owner Bobbie Sue Burton called "campers." Not using the label "homeless" provided a measure of dignity and took away some of the negative attitudes people have toward people in that situation.

Linda then committed to providing bag lunches every Tuesday for the ministry. Several other men and women from Faith caught the vision, and it took off. Although Linda is no longer able to run the ministry, Cyndy Hoops and a few others have taken on the task. Every Tuesday at 9 a.m., they gather in the doublewide to pack 25 paper bags with sandwiches, fruit or pudding, chips, cheese sticks, and a sweet of some sort. Drinks are provided by others at the park.

Later in the day, a group of "deliverers" takes turns getting the prepared meals to the park. Campers gather there about 5 p.m., when they are treated to a hot meal provided by local churches and sometimes local businesses. Along with Faith's bag lunches, others provide hot dogs, soup and desserts, all prepackaged for safety and convenience. There is also a table with clothing, blankets, and other items needed when living outside. Many of the volunteers stay for the meal, talk with the campers, and sometimes pray with them.

Two other ministries provide essential services to the camper population here. The Jesus Loves Me Ministry has a portable unit that provides showers every 2 weeks, and On Spot, a group of nurses, provides basic wound care and other services. Several individuals bring items like towels and supplies to supplement these groups.

The Lutheran Chicks, our Tuesday morning ladies' fellowship group, often helps with this outreach by making mats, collecting towels and blankets, and assembling laundry packets. The packets include \$4.00 in quarters, a soap pod, and a dryer sheet, everything needed for the laundromat. This is such an important ministry, as these men and women have no local shelters to house them. Many are mentally ill or veterans suffering from PTSD and other issues. None have much money or many possessions.

If you would like to help the Camper Ministry, there are many opportunities. You can help make lunches, deliver food, or prepare special packets for the campers. You can provide much-needed items like bug spray, sunscreen, deodorant, nail clippers, wipes, and even bottled water. Think of what you might need if you lived outside in this sweltering weather and bring it to church. We will see if it gets delivered. For more details, or if you have questions, see Cyndy Hoops or call the church office (941-697-3313).

The Bible is full of admonitions to help those less fortunate. In Matthew 25:40, Jesus says giving to those in need is the same as giving to him. And there is a wonderful promise about giving in Isaiah 58:10 – *"and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday"* (NIV).

A Dialogue with Hope



On the final day of June, the leadership teams of Faith and Hope Lutheran churches came together for an inspiring meeting with Pastor Nicole Eastwood from the Florida-Bahamas Synod. Together, we opened a meaningful dialogue about the wonderful possibility of calling and sharing a pastor to guide both of our communities.

This marks an exciting first step as our churches explore new ways to serve their communities together. As we walk down this promising path, we warmly ask for your faithful prayers to guide our hearts, minds, and shared mission.

Upcoming Events

No events planned for July

Birthdays & Anniversaries

Happy Birthday to...

07/01 - Ruthie Rohrbach
07/04 - Carl Despreaux
07/08 - Jean Matz
07/12 - Margaret
Murphy

Happy Birthday to...

07/29 - Debbie Porter
07/30 - Jack Fitzgerald

**Happy Anniversary
to...**

07/08 - Les & Cathie
VanAllsburg
07/19 - Gary & Jennifer
Boehler
07/22 - Harold & Linda
Schultz

If we missed your birthday or anniversary, we're sorry. Please notify Barbra in the church office to have your special dates added.

We are Praying for

Ron Hatt - Surgery Recovery
Tracie Thompson - Health Issues
Judy Jasper - Health Issues
Doug Schuemann - Recovery
Ruth Ash - Recovery

Terry Petersen - Health Issues
Jeff Petersen - Health Issues
Byron Myrick - Recovery
Buster & Carolyn Furman - Health Issues

If you would like to add your name or someone else's to the prayer list, please notify Barbra in the church office. We remove names every three months, unless individuals request to remain on the list.