

# Trinity Tribune

Trinity Lutheran Church ✠ Paola, Kansas



## *The Good News Is the Bad News Is Wrong*

You may have read and heard numerous stories in the news recently about a supposed sharp decline in the number of Americans claiming religious faith. This was a recurring theme across the media right before Easter. Perhaps the timing was a coincidence, but it sure seemed like a coordinated effort to dampen Christians' Easter enthusiasm!

One article was headlined, "Atheism Becomes Largest Religion in U.S." and CNN declared "There Are Now as Many Americans Who Claim No Religion as There Are Evangelicals and Catholics." *The good news is the bad news is wrong!*

These stories were based on the results of an annual survey of religious affiliation conducted for nearly 50 years by the General Social Survey of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. But, the results of this survey are misleading. In reality, it reflects two trends: people fleeing liberal denominations; and marginally active "cultural Christians" with a mostly social connection to the church dropping their claims of membership.

## *Fleeing Liberal Denominations*

Although our Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod is gradually decreasing in membership, largely due to demographic changes associated with the aging of the "baby boom" generation and lower birth rates, our losses are *much* less drastic than many American church bodies:

- ✠ The Episcopal Church was at one time the most prominent Protestant church body in America, with some 3.4 million members in 1967. Fifty years later that has been more than cut in half, down to only 1.4 million members — and falling fast. At their current rate of decline, the once mighty Episcopal Church will basically cease to exist sometime this century.
- ✠ Since it was formed through merger in 1983, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. has lost an astonishing 53% of its members, from an initial 3.1 million to only 1.4 million in 2017. At their current rate of losing around 100,000 members per year, this is another once venerable church body that will soon essentially cease to exist.
- ✠ When the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was formed by merger in 1988, at 5.2 million members they were twice the size of the LCMS. In the years since, they have lost 33% of their members and now have just 3.5 million. A few years ago the National Council of Churches reported that the ELCA had "the sharpest rate of membership decline" among all American church bodies. Like Avis car rental, which used to advertise "We're Number 2 — But We Try Harder!" the LCMS has historically always been the *second* largest American Lutheran church body. However, at the ELCA's current rate of losing members, in just decades the LCMS could become by default the largest American Lutheran church body, and a few decades after that the ELCA will also cease to exist.

What has led to the near demise of these church bodies? Already in 1996, presidential historian and Kennedy biographer Thomas C. Reeves wrote a book with a title that says it all: *The Empty Church: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity*. As the title indicates, Reeves concludes these churches themselves committed institutional suicide.

You may recall that in the early 1970's our LCMS had a debate over whether the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. Fortunately, those who doubted this mostly chose to leave our denomination, eventually becoming part of the ELCA. Other denominations had the same struggle, but in their case the Bible doubters didn't leave — sadly they seized control, and in time drove many Bible believers away.

Because these bodies no longer had a Biblical message to offer, in an effort to become more "relevant" to modern society they introduced radical changes in doctrine, worship, and morality, relentlessly following the descending spiral of modern culture to whatever deplorable depths it may plunge.

Not surprising to those of us who still adhere to "that old time religion," the more heretical these churches became, the more members they lost. The irony Reeves' analysis reveals is that it was their very quest to make themselves more "relevant" that actually made these churches *irrelevant*, not only to society, but even to their own members. As Reeves puts it:

*"Weigh the benefits: Sunday with the family at the beach or in church listening to a sermon on AIDS; working for overtime wages or enduring pious generalities about 'dialoguing,' 'inclusiveness,' and 'sharing and caring'; studying for exams or hearing that the consolations and promises of the Bible are not 'really' or 'literally' true. . . Liberal Protestantism has succeeded in making itself dispensable."*

A conundrum for researchers is that is that while the General Social Survey shows a decline in denominational membership, at the same time many other surveys, such as those by the Pew Research Center, show actual religious practice in the United States is not in decline but on the *increase*.

Further analysis suggests many who fled established denominations are in fact still active Christians. Actually, they were often some of the *most* active members of their former denominations, that these liberal church bodies have driven away. This has led to another recent phenomenon, the sharp increase in “non-denominational” churches. However, because the General Social Survey enquires specifically about denominational membership, quite a few active “non-denominational” Christians simply answer “none.”

Data shows the number of Christians who report praying several times a day *increased more than 8%* since 1991, and those who attend church services *more than once a week* also rose slightly. A comprehensive study by sociologists at Harvard and Indiana Universities concluded: “*We show that rather than religion fading into irrelevance as the secularization thesis would suggest, intense religion—strong affiliation, very frequent practice, literalism, and evangelicalism—is persistent.*”

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### ***“Cultural Christians” Dropping Claims of Church Membership***

Because of the back-to-back traumas of the Great Depression and World War II, in the decades that followed Americans found “safety in numbers” and we became a nation of “joiners.” About the time the General Social Survey began in 1972 was the height of membership not only for many churches but a wide range of other organizations, such as community groups, clubs, lodges, etc. For example, the Boy Scouts of America peaked in 1972 at 6.5 million, but have been steadily declining ever since, dropping a staggering 63% to 2.4 million today.

The phenomenon of Americans “dropping out” in droves from many different organizations that were once considered essential aspects of American life was explored in the 2000 book *Bowling Alone* by Harvard University sociologist Robert D. Putnam. He concluded Americans are becoming more and more disconnected from their families, neighbors, communities—and churches. While compiling the book, bowling became his prime example. Years ago, millions across America belonged to bowling leagues, but today they're more likely “bowling alone.”

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***The data does not support claims for the increased secularization of America, let alone a decrease in the number of American Christians.***

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So, while there was once strong social pressure even for those only marginally connected to a church to identify as members when asked their religious affiliation, people today feel more comfortable being honest about their real lack of church membership, as reflected by their lack of participation in worship and other church activities. The study by Harvard and Indiana Universities described it this way: “*In fact, only moderate religion is on the decline in the United States.*”

Rodney Stark of Baylor University, a leading expert on sociological aspects of religion in America, explains: “*Today, when asked their religious preference, instead of saying Methodist or Catholic, now a larger proportion of non-attenders say ‘none,’ by which most seem to mean ‘no actual membership.’ The entire change has taken place with the non-attending group. In other words, this change marks a decrease only in nominal affiliation, not an increase in irreligion.*” Stark concludes the wealth of data, “*does not support claims for increased secularization, let alone a decrease in the number of Christians.*”

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***Data shows the number of Christians who report praying several times a day increased more than 8% since 1991, and those who attend church services more than once a week also rose.***

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The mistake of news organizations is assuming those who report no particular faith are actual atheists. An old adage says, “Not all who wander are lost,” and though they may be drifters and non-joiners, even among those responding “none” when asked religious affiliation, a third nevertheless say that religious faith is important to them—hardly atheistic!

The number of actual atheists is currently around 3% of the U.S. population—about double since 1972, but still just a statistical blip compared to the massive combined membership of conservative Protestant Christian denominations and non-denominational churches, let alone adding the Roman Catholic and Orthodox church bodies. Consider that our LCMS membership by itself equals around a half percent of the total U.S. population!

So, what about all those articles that declared things like “Atheism Becomes Largest Religion in U.S.”? *The good news is the bad news is wrong!*

Pastor Kevin Vogts



## GUEST PREACHERS

Pastor Kevin and Terry Vogts will be at their daughter Sarah's graduation from the University of Kansas in Lawrence on Sunday, May 19. The old KU tradition was to have commencement on Sunday afternoon, but sadly several years ago KU changed the ceremony to begin Sunday at 10:30am. Our guest preacher that Sunday will be Rev. Tom Harris, retired pastor of Hope Lutheran Church, Shawnee.

On Sunday, June 2, Terry Vogts' parents will be observing their 65th Wedding Anniversary in South Dakota. Our guest preacher in Pastor Vogts' absence will be Rev. Roger Schepmann.



## Sermons for May

Sermons by Pastor Vogts are available in both printed and audio form on our website at [www.trinitylcms.org/sermons](http://www.trinitylcms.org/sermons); as podcasts in the iTunes store by searching for "Rev. Kevin Vogts"; and printed copies of that day's sermon and several of the most recent sermons are available in the Gathering Room.

May 5

*"Be Still and Know That I Am God"*  
*Romans 8:18-39*

May 12 – Mother's Day

*"Jesus: Lamb and Shepherd"*  
*Revelation 7:9-17*

May 19

*Rev. Tom Harries*  
*Guest Preacher*



### Given By

### In Memory or Honor Of

Kevin & Denise Debrick (2).....Fred & Billee Lee and Lorene Debrick  
Gayle Plummer (2).....Leland Gerken, John & Bonnie Plummer

Arlin & Venita Prothe (2) ..... LaVern & Vivian Wilson and Vernele Pipes  
and Jeff & Karen Garrison

Gladys Prothe (2) .....Bob Prothe & Grandma Myrtle Thoden  
and Jim & Sharon Prothe Family

Ron & Marcia Rainse & Family (2)..... Keith Dixon, Father of Marcia  
Dorthy Raines, Mother of Ron

Doris Rodewald ..... Herman Rodewald

Rev. Kevin & Terese Vogts (2) ..... Leroy & Ruth Vogts, Grandparents,  
Great-Great Grandmother Katherina Windler

May 26

*"You Will See Me"*  
*John 14:19*

On May 26 we will conclude our study on *"Put on the Full Armor of God!"* There will be no Bible Class May 19 or June 2, due to Pastor Vogts being gone for Sarah's graduation and Terry's parents' 65th Wedding Anniversary.

Join in Sundays at 9:00am in the Heritage Room for *Bible 101: An Introduction to Understanding the Bible* starting June 9!



## New Bible Class Begins June 9

Why do Roman Catholics have more books in their Bibles than Protestants? What about the "lost" books of the Bible we hear about in the news? We'll look at these questions and more beginning Sunday, June 9 with a new study in Adult Bible Class, *Bible 101: An Introduction to Understanding the Bible*.

## Nursing Home Services May 19

Our thanks to Rev. Don Gaffney for conducting services at Country Club Estates and Vintage Park on May 19. Pastor Vogts will be in Lawrence at Sarah's graduation from the University of Kansas.

Everyone is invited to help by greeting the residents, passing out hymnals, helping them find the hymns, and singing along. The simple services are approximately 20 minutes in length at each facility. We begin at 1:30pm at Country Club Estates and then go to Vintage Park for the second service.

# MAY

## Birthdays and Anniversaries

Our records of birthdays and anniversaries may not complete. If your information is missing or inaccurate, please accept our apologies and notify the Church Office at 913-849-3344 or email Church Secretary Stacey Elkinton at trinitylutheranblock@gmail.com.

- May 1 ..... Clint Haley
- May 1 ..... Eric Prothe
- May 1 ..... Elijah Minden
- May 2 ..... Brad Hendrickson
- May 3 ..... Steve McMullin
- May 4 ..... Maysen Armstrong
- May 4 ..... Alex Brack
- May 4 ..... Alayna Reinke
- May 5 ..... Sarah Berner
- May 5 ..... Kameron Alpert-Munir
- May 5 ..... Mallory Allcorn
- May 6 ..... Emma Reinke
- May 7 ..... Henry Vaughn
- May 8 ..... Garrett Rausch
- May 8 ..... Chloe Rausch
- May 8 ..... Jim Ohlmeier
- May 9 ..... Melanie Golubski
- May 10 ..... Bobbie Jo Debrick
- May 10 ..... Kathy Haley
- May 10 ..... Bobbie Kunard
- May 10 ..... Johnny Pagels
- May 11 ..... Denise Holtz
- May 13 ..... Kraig Kettler
- May 13 ..... Lucy Kettler
- May 13 ..... Nathan Peckman
- May 13 ..... Nicholas Peckman
- May 14 ..... Trish Armstrong
- May 14 ..... Miranda Ferrell
- May 14 ..... Beth D'Amato
- May 15 ..... Matthew Reynolds
- May 15 ..... Kris Stubbs
- May 17 ..... Lori Donahue
- May 17 ..... Dean Gerken
- May 17 ..... Sherri Webb
- May 18 ..... Emily Kettler
- May 18 ..... Susan Ashley
- May 19 ..... Jackie Smith
- May 20 ..... Paul Sombke
- May 21 ..... David Herra



**Our thanks to Twin Valley 4H for again sponsoring the annual Easter Egg Hunt at our Shelter House on April 20. Lots more pictures are in the Photo Gallery on our church web site at [www.trinitylcms.org/photos](http://www.trinitylcms.org/photos).**

- May 21 ..... Barb Koelsch
- May 21 ..... Clifford Prothe
- May 21 ..... Leslie Rudzinski
- May 23 ..... Andy Brack
- May 23 ..... Jeanne Hutchison
- May 23 ..... Amanda Maisch
- May 23 ..... Shane Gibson
- May 25 ..... Stephanie Debrick
- May 25 ..... Roger Holtz
- May 25 ..... Kristie McMullin
- May 25 ..... Janette Reinke
- May 26 ..... Scott Gerken
- May 26 ..... Sharon Grother
- May 28 ..... Alyssa Holtz
- May 28 ..... Kayla Massey
- May 28 ..... Dale Prothe
- May 28 ..... Rawena Shay
- May 29 ..... Wendy Bryant
- May 29 ..... Brandon Gibson
- May 30 ..... Ginny Linville
- May 31 ..... Sarah Pemberton
- May 31 ..... Janet Koelsch
- May 31 ..... Amanda Stubbs
- May 1 . Randy & Jennifer Rethman (21)
- May 16 ..... Ed & Marcie Reyelts (31)
- May 19 ... Mike & Linda Oberheide (40)
- May 19 ... Clifford & Donna Prothe (56)
- May 25 .... Lloyd & Ginny Peckman (56)
- May 25 ..... Jeff & Pam Thompson (39)
- May 30 ..... Stan & Gayle Plummer (38)
- May 31 ..... John & Lori Schlegel (16)

## After Church Snacks

Could you—individual, family, or group—serve snacks sometime after worship? The last two Sundays of May and all the rest of the summer months remain open!

There is a sign-up sheet on the table with the snacks. Our Generations group has generously agreed to provide and prepare the coffee and juice each week! So those signing up are only asked to provide some treat. Thanks to all those providing snacks for Coffee Hour!

May 5  
*Mitchells & McMullins*

May 12  
*Linda Prothe*

May 19 & 26  
*Need Volunteers*

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## Missionaries of the Month



Each month we remember in prayer in our worship services—and you are encouraged to remember in your personal prayers—specific missionaries around the world who are supported by our congregation through our mission offerings to our Synod.

May 5

*Deaconess Kim Bueltmann*  
Germany

May 12

*Benjamin Helge*  
Czech Republic

May 19

*Rev. Jerry & Patty Lawson*  
Russia

May 26

*Rev. Douglas & Angela Thompson*  
Sierra Leone

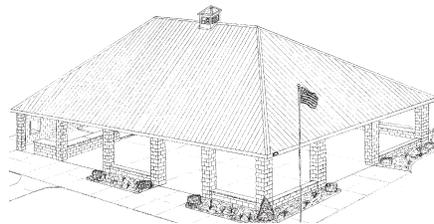


## Sight & Sound Theater Trip

A few years ago a large group from Trinity enjoyed Moses at the wonderful Sight and Sound Theater in Branson, Missouri. Several members of Trinity have seen their current production Samson and report it is fantastic—they want to see it again!

If you would be interested in going together with a group from Trinity sign up on the list in the Church Office. Our proposed date is the matinee on Saturday, June 22. The group discount is \$46 per adult, \$22 for children ages 3-12. The show is great for all ages—kids will love it!

We would either carpool or if we have enough take a bus, and plan to go down and back that day. However, you're welcome to go earlier or stay later on your own if you want to make it a longer trip, and just meet the group at the theater. For more information, or if you're interested but that date doesn't work and another would work better for you, speak with Bill Koelsch or Pastor Vogts, and for more about the Sight and Sound Theater and their Samson production visit [www.sight sound.com](http://www.sight sound.com).



## Shelter House Online Reservations

As we approach the summer months, a reminder that we have an online reservation system for the Trinity Lutheran School Memorial Shelter House. It automatically shows which dates and times are open up to two years in advance, and it is easy to make your reservations online. Go to our church web site at [www.trinitycms.org/shelter](http://www.trinitycms.org/shelter). You will also find there the rules for Shelter House usage. If you do not have access to a computer to make your reservation, you can simply call or speak to Pastor Vogts and he will make the reservation for you.



As they take a break for the summer, our thanks to director Janette Reinke, accompanist Becky Stuzman, and all the choir and tone chimes choir members for their faithful service and beautiful contributions to our worship!



Our 150th Anniversary Pictorial Directories have arrived! See Phyllis Trickett to get a copy for your family. We do have additional copies but initially would like to get a copy to those that are included in the directory.

This project was a labor of love and dedication by several church members, with a special thank you to the 150th Anniversary Committee; Allyssa Henry, designer; Stacey Elkinton, church secretary; and Kyle Minden, photographer. Generations generously paid for the directories with the assistance of a Thrivent card. A special thanks to all that assisted in any way to complete this project!

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## Pastors Lunch May 21

Trinity will be hosting the monthly meeting of the pastors of our Johnson-Miami County Circuit on Tuesday, May 21. If you could help serve lunch and/or provide a dessert please sign up on the counter in the church office.

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## Relay for Life Pancake Breakfast



The "Little Kids Make a BIG Difference" Relay for Life team is hosting Breakfast BINGO will be servicee in our church basement on Saturday, May 18. There will be pancakes, juice, and coffee for a freewill offering. Bingo cards are \$5 each or 2 for \$8. The pancake breakfast will run from 7:00am-9:00am. Bingo will start at 8:00am and prizes will be given to winners!

Come and support our kiddos as they work to make a difference in the fight against cancer! See Lori Schlegel for questions.



Our thanks to everyone who pitched in following the damage to the church on April 29. The National Weather Service officially categorized the event as a tornado. Because of its relatively small size it is classified “EF-0.” It may have been as narrow as 15 feet, and the tornadic winds are estimated at 85 MPH. They say it lasted three minutes and was on the ground for two miles, from about a mile west to about a mile east of the church.

The church’s fire alarm system registered a system fault at 4:11am, when the sensors in the youth room went offline as the roof blew off and the ceiling collapsed, so that was the exact time the church was struck. Though we are saddened by the damage, considering it was an actual tornado, we are grateful there was not a more significant loss.

A structural engineer inspected the building and found it safe for use, so we will have services in the sanctuary and other events as usual. Based on this report, the same general contractor who recently completed our building addition and modernization project will submit to the county for approval a repair plan for the south wing, that will allow saving most of the still standing south wall and largely undamaged eastern slope of the roof.

For safety we will limit access to the south wing on all three levels during reconstruction. Please use the new north staircase or elevator to get to the basement or second floor. The first floor restrooms are out of commission due to a cracked sewer pipe, but the restroom in the basement uses a different line and is fully functional. There is also

a porta potty near the gazebo. The insurance claim is being processed, and the gravestone contractor has surveyed the cemetery and will begin the task of resetting fallen stones.

The church’s unusual original brick was custom made in 1959, and when we added the north wing last year the brick had to be special ordered. We were lucky to get a very close match after 60 years!

God moves in mysterious ways, and last year we “accidentally” got four extra pallets of this special brick that have been sitting in the northwest corner of the parking lot — a good start toward rebuilding the damaged south wall! That beautifully illustrates the comforting promise of Romans 8:28: *“And we know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him.”*