



December Newsletter



Inside this issue

A Word from Pastor Blake.....	2
Updates & Opportunities.....	3
Children's/Youth Ministry.....	4
Elders Report.....	5
Church Happenings.....	6-9
A Word from Pastor Greg.....	10
Missionary of the Month.....	11

Glory



TO THE NEWBORN KING.



Church Office Closed
December 23 & 27
December 30 & January 3
for Christmas Break

Have a joyous and blessed



A Word from Pastor Blake

Who is your King?

1 Samuel 8

I had the joy of attending a preaching conference a couple of weeks ago. For the conference I had to prepare a sermon outline from 1 Samuel 8. I will summarize the passage, but it may be more helpful for you to read it.

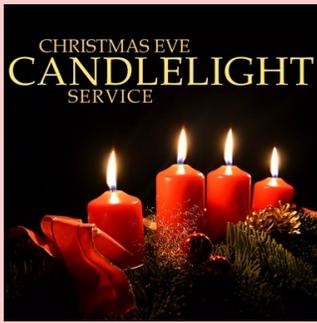
In this passage Samuel makes his kids judges over Israel, but his children didn't follow Yahweh. Instead, they perverted justice and took bribes for personal gain. The leaders of Israel gathered and decided they wanted a king to rule over them like the rest of the nations. The leaders brought their request to Samuel which made him feel rejected by the nation. Samuel brings this request to God who tells Samuel to "obey their voice because they have not rejected you but rejected me from being king over them." Samuel goes back to the leaders of Israel and repeats the warning that God gave him. The king will be someone "who takes" from the people. It will be worse for the people. The story ends with the people not listening to God's warning and demanding a king.

This story has always been difficult for me. In Genesis 17:6 God makes a covenant with Abraham and says, his people will be made into kings. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 gives the laws concerning a king. Both passages are before 1 Samuel 8. Why is God mad that they want a king? The one main difference I see between the Deut. 17 and 1 Samuel 8 is who is choosing the king. Deut. 17:14 it says, "you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord chooses." In 1 Samuel 8:18 it says, "you will cry out because of the king you have chosen for yourself." The difference is the one choosing. The elders never went to God in prayer but decided in their own wisdom that they want a king over them. This king was to bring stability to their kingdom. They wanted him to bring prosperity and protection.

We can take many applications out of this story in the Bible.

1. Israel looks at their problem and determines it can be solved with a king. How often do we look at the problems in our society and think it can be solved with a new political party in power? Kings don't change hearts. Political leaders don't change hearts. The true king changes hearts! We can look at situations and feel hopeless and maybe that is where God wants us. The overwhelming circumstances should drive us to our knees in communion with God.
2. Look at the difference between the leaders of Israel. Samuel seeks God and does what God says. Israel relies on their own wisdom and ignores the warning. They avoid seeking God in their decision. How often do we look for solutions that don't align with what God wants? We look to issues in church and think they can be solved by a new strategy. Maybe the problems are spiritual not strategic?
3. Our desires can make sense in a worldly sense, but they may be godless. A king makes sense. He will protect the nation from other nations, but it turns out that it is a rejection of God. Are we looking for false saviors and false god's in this world? Are we looking to false comforts?
4. Rejecting God and turning to substitutes can subtly happen. The request of Israel sounds a lot like Deuteronomy 17. It sounds very biblical. There was a subtle shift from God choosing the king to Israel choosing a king. We can trick ourselves into accepting our thinking as biblical. In reality it can be a rejection of God if we don't seek Him.
5. Knowledge doesn't lead to life transformation. Israel was told how the king would rule over them, but they rejected the wisdom. We need to love the truth not just understand truth. We can read the Bible and know a bunch of facts about it but do we let it change us? Do we conform our lives to the word of God?
6. When God gives us what we want, it may be a sign of His judgment not His grace. When I hear God's judgment, I often think of the ground opening and swallowing people. Scripture is clear that God's judgment is letting people wander down the path of sin. Romans 1 repeats the phrase "God gave them up." Israel wanted a king. Saul was an act of judgment on Israel.
7. Israel will get a king like the nations which Samuel warns will be a king who "will take" from the people. Deuteronomy talks about a king who God will choose and who will not be like the nations. A good king will give himself to the people. This points us to the real king, Jesus, who gave of Himself. He gave His life so that His people may have life.

Updates and Opportunities



Candlelight Service

5:00 p.m.

Saturday, December 24

(there will be no service on Christmas day)

Everyone is encouraged to come for this special time of worship as we take a break from the hectic pace of getting ready for Christmas by pausing to honor our Lord & Savior, Emmanuel!



Thank you so much to those who made shoeboxes for OCC this year! We collected 51 boxes here at church, and 48 online, for a total of 99 total boxes! There will be 99 little children who will hear the gospel perhaps for the first time and have the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior!

Thank you for your willingness to give!



The Nest

Ladies, come to our Cookie Exchange on December 13 at 7 pm. Bring 2 dozen of your favorite Christmas cookie/treats and the recipe to make copies for everyone there. We can't wait to see you there.



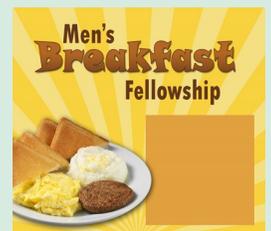
Christmas has come early to our church library and new books are now available to our congregation. A six volume Bible Exposition Commentary by Warren W. Wiersbe is now on hand for those who would like to augment their Bible study. *No Reason to Hide*, by Erwin W. Lutzer, *One Minute After you Die*, also by Lutzer and Nancy De-Moss Wolgemuth's *Heaven Rules*, a reminder that God is in control has also been added. In addition to these books, more pamphlets for use in witnessing are available on the table at the main entrance door. These are there for anyone to take and use when talking to others as the Lord leads.

Yon Abel

Men's Breakfast: Save the Date



Save the date for **Saturday, December 17 at 7:30 a.m.** at church for our men's breakfast. All men are invited for a time of food, fun, and fellowship! Please contact Chris Matula or Chet Kamark with any questions!



Come and join us December 11 at Pizza Ranch
(5450 W. Integrity Way).

We have reserved a community room for after church so we can spend some time eating and enjoying fellowship with one another.



Growing God's Way Ministries



This year our focus for all ministries in PRAYER. Please take time to pray in your classroom and also check out our monthly prayer focus board.

Colossians 4:2 "Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart."

This month the children will be learning: What makes people special? People are special because we are made in God's image, as male and female, to know Him. We will also focus on the true meaning of Christmas, the birth of Jesus!

Please have your child(ren) in the Evergreen Room, bring their Bibles to class. It has been great seeing the children find verses and read from their Bibles. The older ones pair up with the younger ones.

IMPORTANT DATES:

Children will sing two songs in church on December 18.

Dec. 11, Evergreen children will practice at 10am.

Dec. 18, Please have your children at church by **9:30** so we can practice and have them lined up to sing by 10:00.

There will be **NO 9am Sunday School** on Dec. 18, Dec. 25, and Jan. 1.

No Children's Ministry on Dec. 24 and Dec. 25, Children will attend service with their families.



If you are not serving currently, please prayerfully consider serving in Children's or Youth Ministries. Both ministries would be blessed with a few more regular volunteers OR subs. We are also asking families that have young children that are not currently serving to volunteer once every 8 weeks.

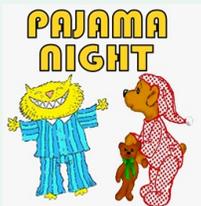
If we don't teach our children to follow Christ, the world will teach them not to.



December 21 - Christmas dress up night. Dress up in your favorite Christmas clothes or favorite nativity character.



December 28—No Awana



Awana will resume on January 4 with pajama night!



Join us Sunday nights from 6:00 p.m.—8:00 p.m. at the church.
Everyone is welcome!



Elders Report



They'll Know We Are Christians

1 Corinthians 6:17

But whoever is united with the Lord is one with Him in spirit.

The song written by Peter Scholtes in the 1960's has remained a favorite reminder to all of us.

We must pray for Unity.

We must walk hand in hand.

We must walk side by side guarding each man's dignity and saving each man's pride.

We are one in the Spirit, We are one in the Lord (2 times)

And we **pray that all unity May one day be restored**

(Refrain)

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love

Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love

We will **walk with each other**, We will **walk hand in hand** (2 times)

And together we'll spread the news, That God is in our land

(Refrain)

We will **work with each other**, We will **work side-by-side** (2 times)

And we'll **guard each man's dignity** and **save each man's pride**

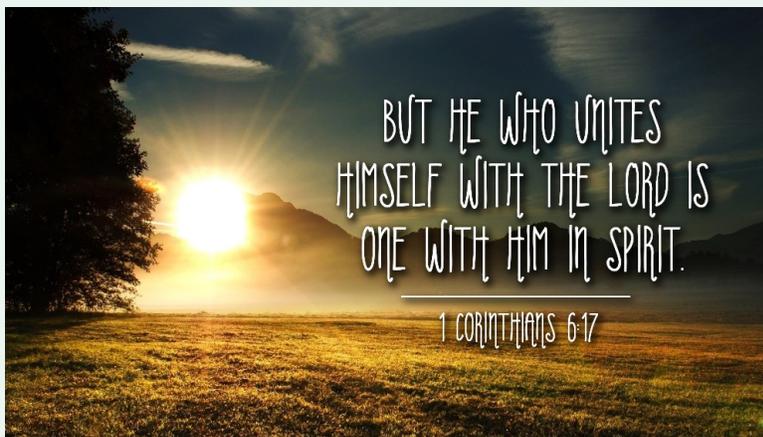
(Refrain)

All praise to the Father From whom all things come

And all praise to Christ Jesus His only Son

And all **praise to the Spirit who makes us one**

(Refrain)



Church Happenings

Playground Construction Fun



Church Happenings



"Let's Do Lunch"



Children's Church/Awana



Thank You's



Dear ACEFC Family,

Thank you all for making ministry a joy. Your gift for pastor appreciation month was far more than I deserve. It was an incredibly gracious and kind gift to myself and Kaylee. We already enjoyed the Chipotle gift card! I am grateful for all who call this church home. I brag about how great the people are in this church because all of you make this a great place to be a pastor. Each and everyone one is truly a blessing to our lives, this church, and the Fox Valley Area.

In Christ,
Blake and Kayleen Burton

DEAR ACEFC FAMILY

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR ALL THE LOVE YOU HAVE SHOWN TO LAURIE AND MYSELF AND TO ALL OF MY FAMILY. YOU HELPED TO MAKE LAURIE'S CELEBRATION OF LIFE INTO SUCH A SPECIAL EVENT. ALL OF OUR OUT OF TOWN GUESTS WERE AMAZED AT HOW EASILY YOU WERE ABLE TO DO ALL THAT HARD WORK!

THANK YOU TOO FOR ALL YOUR PRAYERS AND ALL YOUR ENCOURAGEMENT AS WE PASSED THROUGH THIS MOST DIFFICULT TIME OF OUR LIVES. YOUR STRENGTH GAVE ME STRENGTH AND GOD'S PROMISES GAVE ME HOPE!

LOOKING FORWARD TO COMFORTING OTHERS WITH THE COMFORT I HAVE BEEN GIVEN.

THANKFUL TO BE A PART OF THIS CHURCH FAMILY!

DEAN PANKOW

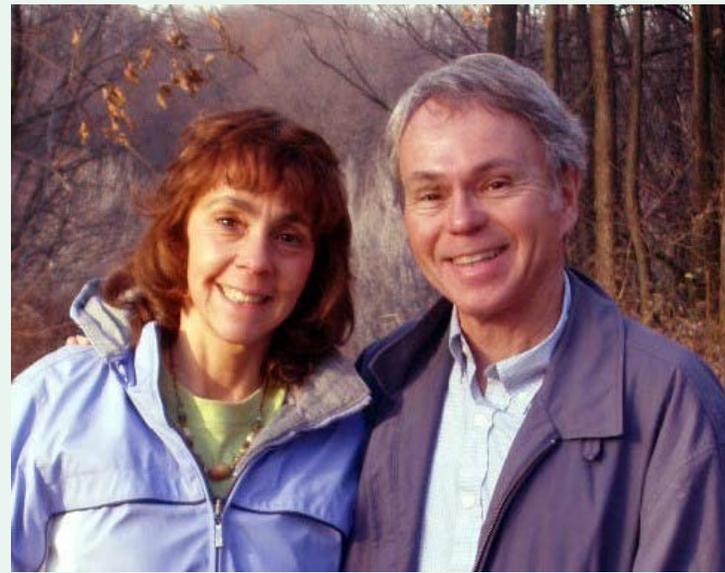
"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you."

Philippians 1:3

Your kindness toward us has eased the pain of this most difficult time.

The family of Laurie M. Pankow

Thank You's Continued



Always rejoice, constantly
pray, in everything give
thanks. For this is God's will
for you in Christ Jesus.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Dear ACEFC family!

Donna & I want to express our deep & sincere gratitude for the amazing gift we received from you to acknowledge Pastors' Appreciation during October. We are humbled by your generosity! We count it a privilege to serve the Lord along side of you. We can never take this blessed opportunity for granted. May God continue to work in everyone's life as we attempt to bring glory & honor to Him. Thank you so very much. May this Christmas season be a wonderful time of praise as we celebrate the birth of our Lord & Savior!

With much love & many prayers,
Pastor Greg & Donna

Some “Additional Thoughts” from Pastor Greg



**“It’s Complicated!”
When & How
Did This Happen?”**



As we step into this month of December, I imagine that most people are sorting through their preparations and plans for celebrating Christmas. Most assuredly, this is a most special time of year, especially for those of us who are faithful followers of Christ. I’ve often been encouraged by hearing about the various traditions others have enjoyed throughout their lives. With that in mind, I’d like to share a couple memories from years past. (One of the reasons why this has come to my mind is because the Elders had a lengthy discussion about how we should schedule our worship times on the weekend of Christmas—and that’s basically because this year Christmas falls on a Sunday.)

I consider that growing up in a Dutch farm community, where the church was the absolute center of most everyone’s life, was a significant blessing for me. In addition to this, I also recognize that life was much (much, much, much) simpler then; not only due to the fact that it was a rural setting, but also because times were different. There was very little technology and contrary to what some might suggest, the tech advancements we have today don’t always increase our productivity. They typically provide an avenue for us to do more things, but that often seems to add more items to our schedules. It might be helpful for many of us to pause and prayerfully ponder about that, asking if that’s what God wants for and from us.

Regarding Christmas, as I noted earlier, our church was the absolute center of most everyone’s life. All of those in my classroom at school didn’t necessarily have the same church background, but the vast majority did and the others noted that our church celebrated in an emphatic way! Our Christmas schedule at church included a Christmas eve service, often with a church choir singing two or three songs, four or five congregational songs (Christmas carols), and a sermon. Then regardless of what day of the week Christmas was, we always had a Christmas morning worship service, usually with a choir (men’s, women’s, or mixed) singing and someone else doing a special music number, along with a children’s sermon and a regular sermon by the pastors. At both of these services, the church was full. It was a glorious way to celebrate the Lord’s birth! Everyone was aware that Jesus was the Reason for the Season, and “Merry Christmas” was common!

My point and purpose for writing this is not to suggest anything about what ACEFC should be doing. Please notice the title at the top of the page. Many times I’ve heard people use the statement, “It’s complicated,” and it’s also been used in movies as a catch phrase to grab the viewer’s attention. In our culture today, often it does seem complicated when we have to choose between things to do or cut out things we’d enjoy doing. Maybe we could ask the Lord God to help us eliminate the things that make our decisions challenging or (can I say it?) **complicated!** It’s simply to provide a view of how things have changed to help us consider how we can honor God each and every day. Those memories are something I treasure, but I’m also convinced that there’s very little we can do to bring back the cherished times of our lives. But I do believe that it might be beneficial for us to prayerfully consider how our personal priorities have impacted the way we view Christmas. It’s how we begin preparing for Easter and that’s the most important event that’s already taken place in history.

Philippians 2:5–8 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

With prayer for God’s glory and praise for His grace, Pastor Greg



Forest Lakes District of the EFCA- *We Are Better Together!*

Our MISSION:

We exist to strengthen our member churches so that together we may multiply transformational churches among all peoples.

Our strategic values:

- Connect: Create environments for relationships.
- Equip: Offer resources and training.

Multiply: Support the multiplication of disciples, leaders and churches.

Our VISION is to enable multiplication by:

RELATIONSHIPS

The foundation of everything we say or do is our personal relationship with all pastors and lay leaders in the District.

- Personal contacts between District staff and pastors/lay leaders

RESOURCING

- Consulting and coaching
- Training
- Staff issues (hiring, evaluating, compensation, etc.)
- Disciple-Making, Leadership Development, Elder Training
- Crisis Intervention and Conflict Management
- Conferences, Retreats, Special Events

REFOCUSING

- Church Health Assessment
- Visioning and vision casting
- Pastoral Health (Ministry Support Program)

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Placement Services (including interim pastors, pulpit supply)
- Credentialing (licensure and ordination)

Discipline

The Forest Lakes District is VALUE DRIVEN:

In all that say or do, the FLD is driven to provide value to local churches as they seek to fulfill their mission. The idea of being “driven” brings to mind being compelled, forced, pressing ahead, relentless exertion, setting in motion, energized, determination, no detours, and mission accomplished. Value is taken from the Latin *valere*; “to be worth”. Value is further defined as “relative worth, utility or importance; degree of excellence; something intrinsically valuable or desirable.” We are value driven.

We are value driven:

- To build relationships with and between churches, pastors and leaders that ...
- To offer or recommend resources that ...
- To help maintain or refocus the efforts of the local church so that ...
- To fulfill our responsibilities in a way that ...

enhances the leadership and ministry of each pastor, leader and church member toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Our Mission here at Appleton Community EFC is to lead all **people** in a growing relationship with Christ.

Growing together in Christ we value:

Biblical Truth

We depend on the Bible as our source of authority in what we believe, what we teach, and how we live. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Worship

We believe that we are created by God to worship Him. Therefore, we live in worshipful response to God's character and activity. (Psalm 86:11)

Prayer

We believe that daily prayer is essential in the life of a believer and as such we pray with expectancy knowing that God is actively involved in our world. (Colossians 4:2)

Evangelism

We believe in sharing the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ with honesty and humility. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Fellowship

We believe that accountability, caring and a sense of belonging are essential for each believer to grow in their relationship with Christ. (Philippians 2:1-4)

Encouragement

We believe we are responsible for caring for and encouraging one another. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)



Appleton Community Evangelical
Free Church
2490 West Capitol Drive
Appleton, WI 54914
Phone 920-735-9971

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December 30 & January 3
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Have a joyous and blessed
Christmas.

Regular Church Office Hours
Closed Mondays
Tuesday—Friday
8:30 am – 2:30 pm

The magic of
Christmas
is not in the presents,
but in
His
presence

We're on the Web!
applefreechurch.org

