

from the past, but current stories get the limelight. If we did offer a Sunday school class on church history, I'm pretty sure there would just be three in the room: me, God and the wall. (I suppose you could count the trinity and all four walls to get us to 8.)

For me, a change in perspective happened when I came to Alto and picked up your 150th anniversary book. Reading the history of Alto, I found it more and more fascinating to see some of the struggles that the church went through. It was exciting to see the growth and expansion of the church and encouraging to see how the church navigated painful times and came out stronger. I've marked up those pages circling dates and major events.

Then, while on a long trip to Florida, Steph and I started to listen to a biography on Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I'd heard of this man in college. Then I read his infamous book on discipleship called "The Cost of Discipleship" in seminary. But, I never really knew his story. Eric Mataxes' "Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy" was a captivating story of a pastor seeking to do what was right under the threats of the Nazi regime. I was inspired to live my faith all the more. I grew in appreciation of this pastor and learning about the past.

From there we have listened to books on Johnathan Edwards, George Muller, George Whitefield, John Wesley, Susanna Wesley, and Benjamin Franklin. These led me to watch documentaries on John Wycliffe, Norman Geisler, William Wilberforce, Martin Luther, Charles Spurgeon, William Tyndall, and Saint Augustine. I am sure, there are many more it would be good for me to learn about.



Here's what I've found... When you look at the story of one person, history comes to life. Worry about dates, events, and locations later. Just know that beyond reading Scripture, entering the story of a saint may be the most encouraging thing you do this year.

PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS

Pick one name from above or another name you've heard of and learn about that person's story. Your heart will be inspired and you'll learn a thing or two about following Jesus. Technology makes it easier to learn than ever before.

Great Sources for History

Hoopla (FDL Library gives free access to audio and ebooks.)

RedeemTV (Free Christian video app on any device.)

YouTube (Free biographical videos are here too.)

www.christianbook.com (Yes, you can buy real books.)

Easy to Read Books :-)

Christian Heroes Then & Now Series (ages 10 and up)

Trailblazers Series (ages 8-11)

PRAY

Lord, help us learn from the past, so we do not make the same mistakes. Open our hearts and minds to hear your truth and change us. Amen

Equipping Youth Update

By Jessa Wedel

Youth Ministry prayer requests for the new year:

- Wisdom and guidance for the search team as they look to fill the Equipping Youth Director position by the end of the school year
- More Bible reading in the new year! We've had several kids hit their "30 day streak" on the Bible app, and are hoping for more kids and more days!
- More prayer in the new year! Several of our students are trying prayer journals for the first time
- Kids and coaches to bond and make lifelong connections
- High School Silver Birch Retreat at the end of February
- Boldness and excitement in sharing the hope that we have in Jesus
- Many God-encounters during our Service scavenger hunt in the spring
- More kids coming to all Before School Bible clubs in the area

Library Update

We have some great news!! We are offering everyone, young & old a FREE vacation!! All you need to do is come to the library, & someone from the library committee will be there to help you with your needs. You just need to decide where you would like to go, what time period, if you want excitement or

romance. The great news is that, you don't have to get on a plane or in a car. You don't even need to pack. In fact, you can stay in your pajamas while you go to another place. How great is that? If you're a curious person about other people, you can even find out about someone in our non-fiction area. Once your eyes are tired & you want to spend time with your family, you can also grab a DVD to watch an inspirational movie. Sorry, popcorn is not provided.

Reverse Offering Stories

A month ago the Deacons left ten \$100 bills in the pews for people to use to bless others. Here are a few more stories of how those gifts were used:

- A couple gave the money to a large family in the Alto area. They were so happy to receive it and will use it to purchase a needed household item that had broken that day. Tears were shed and they said “now we will have a Christmas.”
- I got one of the \$100 bills. Someone then matched it, and gave me a second \$100. Part went into the Salvation Army's Red Kettle, and the other I used to make a donation to the "International Fellowship of Christians and Jews" that gives food boxes to struggling Holocaust survivors around the world, living in poverty. At this time, the donations there were also doubled by a matching donor.

MESSAGES

Thank you for the candy and card. It is very much appreciated.

-Vern Schouten

Thank you for the many acts of kindness shown to me before and after my surgery. Your prayers, get well cards, visits, phone calls, and texts were very much appreciated! Thank you also for the wonderful prayer shawl. It means a lot! Thanks again!

-Gary Navis

We would like to say thank you for the box of candy we received and the visit from Val Bille. Also thank you for your prayers, cards, and phone calls in the recent weeks concerning Jim's health problems. We appreciated your

kindness, thoughtfulness, and prayers. May the spirit of Christmas bless your home with peace and love.

-Jim & Karen Stelsel

Thank you for the box of candy. It was delicious.

-Geraldine Loomans

Thank you for the prayers and support over the last month.

-Jim & Mary Nummerdor

Thank You to the church for the candy at Christmas and to others for the Christmas cards and wishes.

-Ann Boerson

We would like to thank everyone for their Christmas greetings, and the church for the box of candy and Kathy Flier who brought it and for her visit. Thank you very much.

-Paul & Audrey Elenius

Thank you everyone for the Christmas cards & the box of candy, also the bulletins & visits every week.

-Dayton Ter Beest

We want to thank our church family for pouring into our family this last year! With all the uncertainty of Joe's health, the waiting period and the news of us adding another precious baby to our family, we were feeling a lot of mixed emotions. We couldn't have walked through this year without our church family. All the prayers, love, and support given, blew us away. This is a church that truly cares and it shows. We are so grateful and appreciative for each of you and the love you've all poured into our family.

-The Ware Family

Thank you to the church in remembering us with such a wonderful "treat" for Christmas. Special thanks to Bob & Barb for making sure we received it.

-Rollie & Barb Schroeder

I would like to thank the church for the box of Candy. Really appreciated it.

-Kay VandeZande

Thank you to the Church for the box of candy and to Burt Wiersema for bringing it and for the nice visit we had. We are so blessed to be a part of a caring Church!

-Barrie & Ardyce Tenpas

Thank you to everyone for the beautiful Christmas cards. Thank you for the prayers for Bryan.

-John & Faye Janey

Thank you for the Walmart gift card, It was very thoughtful of you. I greatly appreciate it. Thank you so much.

-Ruth Brewer

Thank you for thinking about me during the holidays with the gift card. It was greatly appreciated.

-Claire Smedema

Thank you fro the all of the prayers, cards, and support while Don was in the hospital. It was greatly appreciated. Also, thank you for the prayer blanket.

-Don & Linda Schultz

EVENTS

January Events

Jan
07

Sunday, 9:30am

Elder & Deacon Installation

Join us for the installation of the incoming Elders and Deacons during our Sunday morning worship service.

Jan
14

Sunday, 2:00pm

Go & Tell Evangelism Workshop

Go and Tell is an easy and practical way to equip you to become a fisher of men. This three-hour interactive seminar will provide you with the tools to “be active in sharing your faith so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.”

Jan
15

Monday

“New Part” of Sanctuary Closed

The “new part” of the sanctuary will be closed 1/15/24–2/2/24 for ceiling repairs and hardwood floor refinishing. The rest of the sanctuary will still be open.

Jan
16

Tuesday

CCCD Mission Trip

Pray for the group going on the mission trip to the Caribbean Christian Centre for the Deaf in Jamaica. They will be gone 1/16/24–1/23/24.

Jan
23

Tuesday, 9:30am

Women’s Bible Study

Ladies, join us for a 7-week study on Thessalonians, Tuesdays at 9:30am beginning on 1/23/24.



NEWS

More on Israel & Hamas...

The war in Israel and the division in America is continuing to boil. No doubt Hamas’s attack on innocent Israelis was wrong, just as pro-Palestinian students harassing Jewish students is wrong. The Church stands for justice in the midst of all this. Yet, the issues at hand are complex and believers don’t all agree on the best response. The following podcast gives helpful perspective. You may

want to listen to others in the series with a Palestinian Christian, an Israeli Christian, and a Zionist Jewish Rabbi.

<https://theologyintheraw.com/podcast/do-christians-have-a-theological-obligation-to-support-the-modern-state-of-israel-dr-gary-burge/> You can also watch the video series I used for Sunday School called “Following Jesus in a Land of Conflict.” It is now in the church library.

Alto Staffing Update...

In December, the Consistory met with Keith Twigg, of Slingshot Group, regarding the hiring of an Associate Pastor. He assured us that he is pursuing all possible avenues and that our job description is good. He is hopeful that after the Christmas season there will be increased interest in our position. Also, the Executive Team is meeting in early January to discuss hiring a youth director/pastor.