

# Agapegram

June 2026



A NEWSLETTER OF  
ETERNAL SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH  
& LITTLE LAMBS PRESCHOOL

[www.eternalshepherd.org](http://www.eternalshepherd.org)



## There's No Forcing the Faith

*"If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* John 8:31-32  
EHV

Sharing another article by Lutheran teacher, writer, and theologian Gene Veith:

"Postliberal" Christians are fantasizing about making Christianity the law of the land: Catholic integralists want to bring back an Emperor under the authority of the Pope. Calvinist reconstructionists would like to see a church with temporal authority. Pentecostal Seven Mountain activists want Christians to rule in the "mountains" of family, religion, education, media, entertainment, business, and government so as to bring about Christ's second coming.

So it's a good time to think through whether Christianity can take on political power so as to impose its religious and moral teachings on non-believers. That is, whether religion can be coerced.

According to Luther, Christianity cannot be coerced. Not just *should not* be coerced, but *cannot* be coerced—it's impossible.

... Islam is openly coercive—requiring adherence and punishing deviations. Some Muslims, though, are questioning this application of their religion. It turns out, there is a verse in the [Qur'an](#) that says, "Let there be no compulsion in religion, for the truth stands out clearly from falsehood" (Surah 2:256). Now there are other verses that indicate the opposite, and current coercive practices derive from a long and authoritative tradition based on commentaries to the Qur'an. A new book, though, *No Compulsion in Religion — No Exceptions: Islamic Arguments for Religious Freedom*, edited by the Turkish libertarian Mustafa Akyol, is a collection of essays by Muslims challenging that tradition.

... Mohamad Machine-Chian's remarkable essay on Iran backs up this philosophical speculation with concrete empirical data. The legacy of the Ayatollah Khomeini's "Islamic Revolution" appears to have been to turn his country into a *riddastan*, or "land of apostasy": an astonishing [47 percent](#) of Iranians claim to have no religion in anonymous surveys...

So coercion in religion does *not* make people believe in religion more, though they may pretend to. Rather, coercion makes people believe in religion *less*. Furthermore, coercion in religion *corrupts* the religious people doing the coercion.

This is in line with [what Luther taught](#) on the subject, though he took it further. For example, here is what he says in his 1523 treatise [Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeved](#) ....:

*... faith is a free act, to which no one can be forced. Indeed, it is a work of God in the spirit, not something which outward authority should compel or create. ... they only compel weak consciences to lie, to disavow, and to utter what is not in their hearts. ... faith and heresy are never so strong as when men oppose them by sheer force, without God's word.*

Thus, for Luther, coercion in matters of inner convictions is wrong, impossible, and counter-productive. Since faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit, no one can be forced to believe. It follows that heresies, doctrinal errors, and mistaken faiths must be dealt with by the Word, not the Sword.

The most coercion can do is create hypocrites. People who pretend to believe on the outside, but actually on the inside reject and rage against the faith that is being forced upon them. Meanwhile, those doing the coercing and the religious body they represent are not only corrupted by “the ‘ego trip’ of the self-righteous,” turning them into hypocrites too, in the case of Christianity, they do something even worse. They turn Christianity into a religion of law, rather than the gospel. They become fixated on demanding that people be good—which is impossible, given the reality of sin—instead of proclaiming to these sinners the forgiveness won by Jesus Christ. ...

Article with full quotes & application to the family: [Why You Cannot Coerce Religion | Gene Veith](#)

The right answer is much simpler: Go into all the world with the Good News and do the work of discipling by baptizing and teaching. And let the Holy Spirit do His job of changing hearts in His timing.

*So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ.* Romans 10:17 EHV

*~ Pastor David*

## **JUNE MINISTRY OF THE MONTH**

### **Board of Christian Outreach**

Be sure to check out the bulletin board to learn more about Huntington's Disease and all of the other areas served by the Board of Christian Outreach.



# Deaconess' Musings

## Why Are You Here?

*“Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?”*

*(Rite of Confirmation & Reception of Members, Lutheran Service Book)*

Hold on a minute. What's so special about *this* confession and why do I need to say that I'm willing to face death for it? That sounds so...unrelenting and inflexible. I mean, I *like* what is said at church. Well, for now that is. Until something more interesting comes up. Then I'm not so sure about this whole *confession* and “dying-for-it” thing. Does this sound familiar? It does to me and my own thoughts. We've all thought it one way or another.

We are not called to live a confession that is mushy or blasé, but one that is sure and confident in the knowledge of the faith given to us by Christ. Even throughout the world as trends and social media hashtags can change faster than winds change, the confession that Jesus is Lord, and what that means, does not and never will.

What does this unrelenting confession that Jesus is Lord mean? It is one that is sure of what is taught clearly in Scripture. For where do we find Jesus? Not in our own thoughts and experiences, but only in the clear words of God's Word. So now knowing that, we confidently seek to read and comprehend more and more, using the brains and understanding God gives us. We cannot allow ourselves to become complacent in our Christian life. You need to know what you believe and why. Why do you believe that Jesus is Lord? Because He's given you that super awesome car/house/pet/friend/whatever? Or is it because He died and rose from the dead for you, and has claimed you as His own through Baptism and the forgiveness of sins?

Why do you come to a Lutheran church? Because of the food? The fellowship? Or is it because we claim that to be Lutheran is to follow Jesus and proclaim His Gospel message of forgiveness? Why? Why are you here? Do you only come because it seems like the “right” thing to do, that this what you've done for as long as you can remember, or has being a Christian Lutheran become something you only are when you *feel* like it?

Or do you come to confess and acknowledge your sins and hear that those sins have been/are forgiven? Do you come to hear the preaching of God's Law and how you cannot keep it, but that Christ came and did what you could not and that He bought you back from sin, death, and the devil with His death and resurrection? Do you come to hear, study, and grow in that faith planted inside you by the Holy Spirit?

Being a Christian, and a Lutheran at that, does not mean we allow ourselves to become apathetic and unmoved by the Word. We boldly and firmly confess that Jesus is Lord. That confession then impacts *everything* about us – including our lives “outside” church.

So. Why are you here? I'm here because I need the word of forgiveness continually spoken over and to me. I need the Law preached to my Old Adam so that I can fully rejoice in the comforting message of Christ's Gospel. I need the forgiveness and strength given at the rail, in the body and blood of our Savior. I am here, not because I want to here, but because I *need to* be here.

Lord, I believe; help my unbelief. *Mark 9:24*

~ *Deaconess Holly*

## *Comfort Dog News*

Seth continues to be a busy boy not only in our community but also with special requests for his presence at various facilities and events. I am often amazed that this ministry has grown so much over the last 7 years where sometimes Seth has more requests than he or his team can physically handle. If Seth could talk, he would probably whisper in my ear - wouldn't a second Comfort Dog be great? Are you interested in helping us achieve that goal? Judy Reese is willing and able to coach you in all you need to know in various positions such as a handler, ministry partner, caregiver or a support partner. Until we have a team of 10 handlers which includes the caregivers, we won't be able to receive a second Comfort Dog. By joining the second team, you will be blessed beyond measure so why not contact Judy today if you want to know more or join this incredible ministry!  
**Judy Reese: 618-980-1134, [topdog2eslc@gmail.com](mailto:topdog2eslc@gmail.com)**

Here are some of the special events Seth and his team will be attending in the weeks ahead in addition to his regular local community visits:

**May 29-31, LCC Re-engagement Event Spartanburg, SC (Hurricane Helene)**

**June 6, 11am-1pm Oconee County Cancer Survivors Day at Oconee Memorial Hospital (if you are a cancer survivor you are invited to attend this event so come by and say hello!)**

**June 12, 9:30am -2:00pm Vacation Bible School at Trinity Lutheran Church, Athens, GA**

**June 26-28 – LCC Southeast Regional Meeting at CrossWaters Lutheran Ministries (formerly Island Lutheran), Hilton Head, SC**

We are looking forward to all the events above and moving forward with our 2<sup>nd</sup> Comfort Dog in the future as we wait upon the Lord!

*To God be the Glory,  
Kyra Carbone, Top Dog for Team Seth  
864-932-8308*



## **Welcome Dave and Becky Rutkewic!**

Dave and Becky moved to Keowee Key in 2012. Previously they spent two years in Dawsonville GA and prior to that lived in Vienna VA, 15 miles west of Washington DC. Becky is a retired USAF Colonel, spending the last 8 years of her career at the Pentagon. She also sold real estate in the local area for 12 years. Dave is a retired 31 year career Delta Air Lines Captain and also an USAF veteran pilot. They have been married for 20 years and have a blended family of 4 grown children. Two daughters who live in the Pittsburgh area, a son in Senoia GA and one son here in Seneca. Life is busy enjoying life on Lake Keowee, traveling in their Oliver Camper Travel Trailer, spending time with friends and their 4, soon to be 6 grandchildren. They found ESLC through friends and are excited to be a part of this faithful, friendly and caring church. Make a point to introduce yourself next time you see them!

## **From Little Lambs Preschool and Board**

The 2026 Little Lambs Spaghetti Supper and Auction fundraiser was a tremendous success! The Preschool Board is incredibly grateful to everyone who contributed to keeping this important ministry strong. Total proceeds from dinner tickets, the silent auction, and donations exceeded \$16,000.

Your generosity directly supports our program by providing essential supplies, equipment, and scholarship funds for our families. We extend heartfelt thanks to the members of ESLC for your continued support. Because of you, this local ministry continues to grow, sharing the love of Jesus with young families in our community. Our children are blessed to benefit from an excellent, developmentally appropriate program led by dedicated and talented teachers.

Little Lambs Director Gina Cote and the LLP Board are also deeply thankful for our amazing volunteers. From those who cooked, chopped, sliced, stirred, served, and cleaned, to those who organized, transported, and documented, and managed auction items and donations—your efforts made this event possible.

We celebrated the graduation of 17 of our four-year-old students on May 21. Congratulations to those wonderful boys and girls! We pray that the strong Christian foundation they have built at Little Lambs will remain with them as they begin their journey into public school this fall.

What a wonderful way to help celebrate 24 years of supporting our littlest lambs! Thank you all for your generosity, time, talent, and heart!



## Welcome to the Peele Family!

Stephen and Briana Peele, along with their children Gracie (6) and Simon (3), live in Liberty. They met as students at Clemson in 2009 and will celebrate eleven years of marriage in June. They both now work at Clemson, with Stephen serving as a Senior Lecturer and Briana as a Project Manager. Stephen grew up as a pastor's child in a different denomination, but in adulthood, questions about doctrine and the church led him to discover Confessional Lutheranism, and the pieces of the puzzle came together over the course of many years. Gracie is a rising second grader and enjoys dolls, stuffed animals, and crafts. Simon attends Little Lambs and loves trains, trucks, and cars. Briana enjoys knitting and spending time outside, often at the same time. Stephen enjoys the natural world. The Peeles are thankful to be members of ESLC.

## FOOTHILLS CARE CENTER BABY BOTTLE DRIVE



It is time for our annual Baby Bottle Drive to benefit the Foothills Care Center (FCC)! Eternal Shepherd has been supporting FCC for over 14 years with the baby bottle drive and other donations. We will provide an envelope for the donations. **The Baby Bottle Drive will run through Sunday July 26<sup>th</sup>.**

Your generosity throughout the years has been greatly appreciated by FCC and the clients that frequent the center for hope, assistance, guidance, and love. Most importantly, precious babies' lives are saved! Please prayerfully consider supporting the Baby Bottle Drive this year.

Special envelopes will be placed in your church mailbox. Please make checks out to Eternal Shepherd Lutheran Church, write "Baby Bottle Drive" on the memo line. If you prefer to donate online, use your existing Eternal Shepherd online account. Then select the Foothills Care Center tile.

We will donate the money we collect to the Foothills Care Center in August. For questions or more information call Tracy Cochell at 404-433-7338.

## STEWARDSHIP NEWS

What do you like to do? What special Skills do you have? What is your passion?

Can any of your likes, skills or passions be used to fill some of the needed JOBS, Joyous Opportunity for Believers, which appear monthly in the Agapegram or on the Church Bulletin Board? Please consider seeing if your God- given abilities can be used within Eternal Shepherd to fill a current need.

I am happy to report that the Youth leader position has been filled.

One reason that Eternal Shepherd is such a great community of believers is because of all the service that we freely give within the church and in the community. Thank you for taking the time to review the church's needs.



Sue Hauser, Stewardship

### **Eternal Shepherd J.O.B. Board Joyous Opportunities for Believers**

#### **Christian Education Secure Volunteers**

Secure volunteers are needed for VBS which will be held the week of June 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>. Contact Cyra Phelan for more details at 843-302-1167.

#### **Church Library Helper**

Assistance is needed in the church library twice a month. Please contact Cyra Phelan at 843-302-1167.

#### **Altar Care Members**

Serve as a member of the Altar Care team. Timeframe is one month a year and training is provided. The main duties include preparing the altar before the service and changing paraments during the assigned month. Please contact Tracy Cochell at 404-433-7338 for more information...

#### **Handicap Ramp Building Assistance**

If you like to build things, please join the team that builds ramps throughout the community. Please contact Deek Decker at 864-356-2135 for more information

#### **Ushers and Readers**

If you are interested in serving during worship services, please contact the church office at 864-882-3209 or email [office@eternalshepherd.org](mailto:office@eternalshepherd.org).

#### **Hospitality Members**

If you like to cook or entertain, please join the team that assists in the kitchen preparing food for various church functions; please contact Colleen Hesemann at 864-784-0421.

# Eternal Shepherd **J.O.B.** Board **Joyous Opportunities for Believers**

## **Property Management Volunteers**

If you are concerned about the upkeep and maintenance of the church facility and property, please consider assisting with special projects or on a as-needed basis. Please contact Paul Sherman at 864-602-3262 for more information.

## **Church Website Webmaster**

The webmaster manages and maintains the Eternal Shepherd's website. Key responsibilities include ensuring that the site is running smoothly, updating contents, maintaining security and troubleshooting technical issues. Please contact Pastor Hammer or Deaconess Holly at 864-882-3209.

## **Toys for Gods Kids Volunteers**

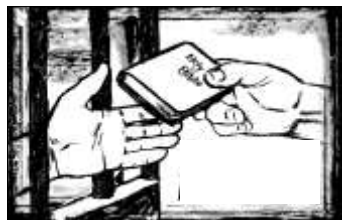
Help is needed in cutting out the car bodies using a scroll saw or band saw. If this is something that you would like to do, please contact Pastor Ray Ramsburg at 904-583-1214 or Mike Hauser at 864-719-0474 for more information.-

## **Christian Outreach Chairman**

If you are interested in directing our evangelism and charitable services to the community, this job is for you. You will lead monthly Christian Outreach Board meetings and attend Council. You will also request disbursement to various charities that the church supports. Please contact Ann Miller at 864-637-8353 for more information.

## **Prison Ministry**

The Prison Ministry team visits Oconee County Detention Center in Walhalla once a quarter. Bibles are distributed on Friday prior to a follow-up visit on Saturday for devotions and prayer requests are taken. Along with the devotions cookies are given to the inmates. Usually around 30 dozen cookies are needed to be baked and bagged. If you are interested in serving our Lord in this important ministry as a volunteer to assist with devotions and prayer requests, lead devotions or bake cookies, contact Delane Dukes at 864-247-4282. Please leave a message and I will contact you as soon as possible. Thank you!



## MISSION BOARD NEWS

### **OUR SCHOOL IN PAS BONBON HAITI FLORISHES ADAPTING TO LIMITED SPACE**

Actually, the space available is the entire land owned by Pastor Samuel, who founded the church and school on his land – named Pas Bonbon. On part of the land we built a Kitchen, Boys & Girls Restrooms and showers, planted over 100 fruit trees, and provided pumps to bring water from the river adjoining his land. That river is also used for baptisms as shown below. The classrooms are mostly covered and walls are somewhat lacking. We also feed all 326 students every day through Trinity Hope, Nashville, TN. We cover the cost of 28 cents per meal, which was designed as “the most nutrition a child could get in a single serving”. The staff includes the teachers, principle, cook, and gatekeeper – and ESLC covers their meager salary each month. Each day begins with all the children outside singing the Apostles Creed. We continue to supply Bibles and Luther’s Small Catechism in both French and Creole. Pastor Samuel built the church by hand and hopes to someday have it enclosed along with separate buildings for classrooms. If you know of other churches that might want to help support this mission, please let me know. Pas Bonbon is in fellowship with the LCMS and under the direction of Pastor Walta Clercius, who has visited Eternal Shepherd several times. More info – contact me [Lars.Helland48@gmail.com](mailto:Lars.Helland48@gmail.com)





Join us for a Tropical Trek VBS  
at Eternal Shepherd!

June 15-19, 2026, 9a-12p

Ages 3\*-rising 6th Grade welcome!  
(Limit of 20 3-5 year olds)

\*Potty-  
trained 3s



Scan QR Code  
to register  
today!



## Operation Christmas Child News:

Working in the Church Office left me with very little time to work on the Christmas Shoebox Ministry. Last year several people volunteered to be “Santa’s Helpers” and assemble Shoebox items in the comfort of their homes. We need that help even more this year!

I will be calling all those who helped with assembly last year to see if you’d like to help again this year. Your help is much appreciated.

If you would be willing to help with this wonderful ministry, whether here at church, or from your home, please let me know.

Operation Christmas Child will be the Ministry of the Month in July. Please be sure to check out all that we’re planning to do this year, including packing 420 Shoeboxes in October!

~Terri Baumann, OCC Project Leader



## Feed The Hungry Dates in 2026

Saturday, January 17

Saturday, April 11

Saturday, July 11

Saturday, October 10

Please add these dates to your calendar and remember that we will also need cookie bakers for those dates as well.

Our next Feeding the Hungry Ministry Event is Saturday, 7/11/26. To prepare for this event, we need approximately 8 volunteers to help assemble the sandwiches and pack the lunches.

PLEASE NOTE THE SCHEDULE: We will meet at church in the Fellowship Hall at 9:30am on Saturday, 7/11/26. It will take approximately one hour to complete this task. Then later on that same morning, Saturday, 7/11/26, we will need approximately 8 volunteers to assist with the delivery, set-up, and handout of the lunches to the Our Daily Bread home. We need to be there by 11am. If you would like to volunteer for either of these times, please call Mark Kunkel at (248) 766-8002 and let me know? Thank you for your support!

# Dylan will be in Ghana in June:



You probably recognize Dylan, he is taller than Lars and typically sits toward the front during the Adult Sunday School hour. Our Church has partnered with Dylan for his Mission Trip this month to Ghana, Africa. He will be going there to create a Navigator Team, and teach them to duplicate what he is doing at Clemson University Campus Ministry. Please keep him and his mission in prayer.

**CHAMBERLAIN (9), Dylan**

514 Issaqueena Trail

Clemson, sc 29631

dylan.chamberlain@navigator.org (Dylan)

843-810-7207 (Dylan)



**FOOD BANK NEWS:** Please help us in collecting preferred needed canned, or boxed grocery items each month to help restock the Golden Corner Food Pantry's shelves. **June's** preferred product is "**Canned Fruit**" (Please place your items in the containers marked Food Bank down by the Fellowship Hall). ~*Thank you for your generosity and support.*



## The church has received a donation of Hearing Aids

A member of the congregation has donated a set of almost new, lightly used hearing aids. See the pictures below.



If you could use these items, please contact the office. They will be given to whoever contacts us first.



## June Birthdays

- |                          |                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 - Colleen Hesemann     | 18 - Brian Ackerman |
| 2 - Bill Barthel         | Renee Beitz         |
| Frank Burinsky           | Ben Smith           |
| Cecil Murray             | 19 - David Smith    |
| 4 - Sue Blount           | 21 - Jody McKibben  |
| Brian Bunning            | 22 - Sara Gugel     |
| 6 - Shirley Coale        | 25 - Kane Beck      |
| Dennis Love              | Barbara Wilken      |
| 7 - Sue Kunce            | 26 - Leo Gemkow     |
| 8 - Alana Madden         | Elaine Heller       |
| Tanisha Wood             | 27 - Harry Hornburg |
| 9 - Debbie Bell          | 28 - Tony Alford    |
| Marlene Bell             | 29 - Hardy Mitchell |
| 11 - Paul Lautenschlager | 30 - Andrew Zirbel  |
| Maril Robertson          |                     |
| 15 - Oliver Scott        |                     |
| 16 - Kelly Bunning       |                     |

## June Anniversaries

- 3 - Bruce & Shirley Woods
- 6 - Stephen & Briana Peele
- 9 - Jon & Susan Tyner
- 11 - Rick & Ann Cochell
- David & Beth Phillips
- 14 - Lucas & Lindsay McKay
- 14 - Woo & Lisa Wagner
- 16 - Bruce & Linda Overby
- 17 - Charlie & Lisa Hill
- Matt & Jacquie Wilson
- 22 - Ned & Beth Renfroe
- David & Jonette Stupke
- 23 - Harlan & Barb Swift
- 24 - Jim & Pat Jacques
- Keith & Cyra Phelan
- 25 - Dan & Jeanne Arkfeld
- 26 - David & Lee Smith
- 28 - Brian & Kelly Bunning

≧HAPPY≦  
Father's  
≧DAY≦

AS A FATHER  
HAS COMPASSION  
ON HIS CHILDREN,  
SO THE LORD  
HAS COMPASSION  
ON THOSE WHO  
FEAR HIM.

PSALM 103:13

## **SERVICE TIMES**

8:30 a.m. Worship Service  
(Communion 2nd & 4th Sundays)

9:45 a.m. Sunday School  
& Adult Bible Study

11:00 a.m. Worship Service  
(Communion 1st & 3rd Sundays)



## **THOSE WHO SERVE**

Pastor: David Hammer

Deaconess: Holly Cox

Secretary: Denise Stewart

Preschool Director: Gina Cote

Choir Director: Rick Schmidt

Choir Accompanist: David Phillips

Organist: David Phillips

## **MISSIONARIES**

Nate Esala, Lutheran Bible Translators

David & Dr. Arianna Shirk, Kenya

S.E.D. Missionaries to Peru

Eternal Shepherd Lutheran Church  
220 Carson Rd.  
Seneca, SC 29678