

**New Member Information**  
**First Lutheran Church of Minot, North Dakota**  
**July 2008**

*Our mission...gather in faith, grow through grace...share the good news of Jesus Christ!*

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**Why membership?**

At FLC, we see ourselves as more than just a place for people to worship, we see ourselves as a community of believers here to minister to our entire community. We have people who attend worship services on occasion, such as students, military personnel, and visitors to Minot. But we also have *members*. We invite you into membership with us, and want to prepare you better for membership with us. We believe you, like us, want to be connected to a community centered in Jesus Christ, who understand that Jesus receives us by grace and forgives us by unconditional love and mercy. But who also understand and accept that Jesus sends us into the world to do good works that he has prepared in advance for us to do.

1. Membership is biblical. The bible never uses the word “church member”, but it does speak about being part of a body, and those passages that use this “body language” are from books of the New Testament whose subject matter is primarily the church, like Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians. Membership helps those who are in leadership in local congregations to identify those who want them to carry out their God given task of shepherding. We at FLC will minister to whoever comes to us and seeks the ministry of a Christian congregation. But it is important for us to know who comprises our “flock”, so that we can specifically pray for them, and at the same time count on them to participate in helping us imagine, build, and sustain the ministries of this church.

2. We believe that membership has benefits for you. Increasingly we hear experts say that our nation, especially since the 1960’s, has grown suspicious of large organizations. Watergate, corporate scandals like Enron, political, business and even church leaders involved in wrongful or illegal activities, has tarnished the reputation of organizations. Moreover, our culture often diminishes the importance of commitment, placing individuality above shared responsibility as a value we embrace. Membership in a church is one way to steer us out of that trend, out of “good intentions”, and into the clear light of committed participation.

**How do you become a member of the church?**

In our Lutheran tradition, that is an easy answer. Through baptism. Baptism “accomplishes” two things. First it extends God’s grace to the baptized in the form of the forgiveness of sins. Thus, baptism is intensely personal, for it is God addressing an individual and saying “*you are*

*now given a new name...”child of God”*. But baptism is also intentionally communal. In baptism, God also makes us a member of the body of Christ, which is the church. Dr. James Nestingen of Luther Seminary once put it this way; *“God is our father, but the church is our mother”*. If you are baptized, you are already a member of the church. You were given “new life...spiritual life” by God in baptism. But God then places you in the arms of someone who can feed you and care for you and teach you. That is our spiritual “mother”, the church. God also intends that we be part of communities that participate in the works and worship that keeps us accountable to God and one another. Then through us, to those who may still be unaware of the love God has for all people in Jesus Christ, people who in the Lutheran church we often call “our neighbor”.

### What is required of members?

The covenant of baptism begins with the action of God. He accepts us into his family without condition. As Ephesians 2:8 says, *‘for it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God’*. Ephesians 2 is clear that no “work” can save us. But the passage does remind us that baptism calls us into a relationship, and all relationships, if they are to have meaning, not only extend to us privileges, they place upon us certain responsibilities.

In our Lutheran tradition, we “confirm” baptized members sometime in their early teen years. It is an age of accountability, and confirmation is a period of instruction that prepares the baptized to now take public ownership of their baptismal privileges and responsibilities. At FLC, we “confirm” in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Our service of confirmation asks each candidate the following questions. *Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in baptism;*

1. to live among God’s faithful people,
2. to hear his word and share in his supper,
3. to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
4. to serve all people following the example of our Lord Jesus,
5. and to strive for peace and justice in all the earth?

This “confirmation promise” serves as our guide for membership in a congregation.

Members are expected to;

1. Worship regularly.
2. Hear and study God’s word, and receive Christ in the sacrament of Holy Communion for the strengthening of our faith.
3. Apply our faith to daily life, in all the vocations God has called us into.
4. Use our gifts and abilities through FLC in whatever way helps our neighbor.

5. Be committed to the larger mission of the church in the world, and to support it with our time, prayers, and financial resources as good steward of God's gifts.

### **How do you become a member of FLC?**

If you are from another congregation of the Lutheran tradition, and have been both baptized and "confirmed", we encourage to attend worship with us, visit with one of our pastors, and attend a brief information session that we hold regularly throughout the year, usually on Sunday mornings. This will help you become familiar with the ministries of FLC, the vision and goals we have for our congregation's future, and how you can become a valued part of our community. Then we will receive you at one of our "new member" worship services, held each fall, winter and spring.

If you have not been part of a Lutheran church in the past, come to us from another Christian tradition, or if you are someone who has had little exposure to the Christian faith in your life thus far, then we suggest, in addition to our general information and welcome sessions, that you meet with one of our pastors for an agreed upon number of additional sessions. These would be intended to prepare you for baptism, or to instruct you in the traditions of the Lutheran church if you have already been baptized. These sessions will be of great benefit to you we believe, for they will help answer many of the questions that inevitably arise about why Lutherans worship the way we do, what our specific beliefs are as concerns baptism and the Lord's supper (Holy Communion), and how the Lutheran church relates to other Christian traditions. Some of these questions would be addressed in materials we have in our new member packet, but additional conversation and instruction is always available and encouraged.

### **May I worship and partake of Holy Communion before becoming a member?**

You are welcome to worship with us regardless of your background in or understanding of the Christian faith. One of the more common questions we are asked by visitors is "*can I come for Holy Communion*"? At FLC, we celebrate the Lord's Supper each week. We believe this is the supper of the baptized. If you are a baptized Christian, regardless of what tradition you come out of, you are welcome here at the Lord's table. If you or any of your children have not been baptized, we invite you to meet with one of our pastors to prepare you for this, and then after baptism, to begin to receive communion. Our custom here is to welcome all children to the Lord's table. If baptized, regardless of their present age, children can receive the bread and the wine. Parents are asked to guide their children in this matter.

If a parent wishes their child to receive Holy Communion, they are encouraged to come forward with them and have them extend their hands to receive a wafer and take a chalice to receive wine. Parents of small children and infants often allow their child to dip their wafer into their chalice, and thereby take in a smaller portion of wine. But children are encouraged to receive both the bread and the wine. If a parent prefers that their child wait, we ask that they instruct them to keep their hands to their side when coming forward, and they will receive a blessing. Parents who wish to participate in communion instruction with their child are encouraged to contact one of our pastors, who can provide age appropriate materials for home instruction. **Formal communion instruction is offered by our pastors for all children in the fifth grade.** For many this leads to their first communion, for others it provides that vital teaching to accompany their previous participation in the sacrament.

### **To summarize what we mean by membership**

Romans 12:3-6 likens the congregation to a human body. Roughly speaking, we are the eyes, ears, tongues, hands, and feet of Jesus Christ. We are called to make the invisible, visible. The “body” of Christ has many functions, just as a human body does. The body of Christ has many parts, just as a human body does. We are to be humble about what part we are to play. But we are not to be ashamed to play a part. Eyes are of no use without minds that can discern what is seen, or feet to get them to where they want to go. Lips are of little use unless there are ears to hear what is being said. So in the body of Christ, we all have a function.

We all have capabilities, and we see them as God given. God designed the eye for a specific function in the human body. It can't do what a hand does though. In the church, we have a part to play. Some of you can teach, others mentor, others sing, others pray, others serve in ministries of compassion, others in administration. Some of you are gifted with young people, others with old. All of you can give of your financial resources, though each in varying degrees. The church, and FLC need all of you, and we are glad you are thinking of joining with us.

We believe membership will benefit you greatly. We believe we can benefit as a congregation, an outpost of the kingdom of God, if you become part of us. We ask of you that you give of yourself as you are able. We pledge that we will be attentive to your individual and family needs, working with you to give glory to God and be useful servants in his world. All this we do in the name of Jesus Christ, who in Mark 10:45 gave us the image of what church membership is all about. Jesus said (of himself) “*the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*”.

In one of the most famous speeches in American history, newly elected President John F. Kennedy said to the *nation* “ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country”. We want you to see FLC as a place to come for spiritual strengthening, for comfort in the midst of trials, for guidance in the midst of temptation. We all share these experiences with you. But we also want you to see that the church is more than a place to have our own needs met. Meeting needs is what we do for each other. That is why the church exists; to give ourselves first and foremost to God, then to each other and our neighbors in service. Then our lives will be a reflection of the Lord who loved above all, not himself, but us.

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## **Some Additional Information about First Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Tradition**

### **Understanding our callings in the world; Lutheran Vocation:**

One of the distinctive features of the Lutheran tradition is our teaching about “vocations” Martin Luther believed that we are Christian in and through 4 callings in life. Those were;

1. Family member
2. Worker
3. Citizen
4. Church member.

In each of these vocations, we serve the Lord and our neighbor. In each, we experience what we call in our Lutheran tradition, cross and resurrection, law and gospel. In our vocations, we have to work, make sacrifices, experience disappointments. But through them we also find satisfaction, receive the blessings of others, and experience joy. God’s law is at work in them commanding us to honor our callings and so to make sure our neighbor is helped. God’s grace is at work in them too, offering forgiveness throughout and providing for new beginnings.

Here at FLC, we want to recognize and honor our vocations. We want to help our members make the connection between all four of the vocations in which our life is lived, because in them our Christian faith is lived. We pledge ourselves to supporting our members make the connection between faith and daily life, the ‘Sunday-Monday’ connection. We propose to do that with worship that is biblically based, bible study opportunities that teach the faith so that life change takes place, and guiding our members to deliberate participation in Christian service as they are led, gifted, and equipped.

### **In Summary:**

First Lutheran has a long history in Minot. We were the first congregation founded in the fledging farm community on the banks of the Souris River, which became a bustling railroad town in 1886. It was then that the Great Northern Railroad and its legendary chairman, James J. Hill, decided to cross the Souris (Mouse) river near here, on his way to the Pacific. He named this

town after a friend of the family, Henry D. Minot. The land on which this church, and much of Mr. Hill's railroad was built, belonged at the time to a member of First Lutheran, Mr. Eric Ramstad.

We look with pride at our past, which includes involvement in the Nurses Training School housed at Trinity Hospital, as well as the founding of Trinity Nursing Home. The First Lutheran Church Foundation, begun in the late 1960's, and which today has endowed funds of nearly \$650,000, has been used to send many members of FLC to the seminary and on to parish ministry. It also emphasizes overseas mission work, and provides several thousand dollars every year to support missionaries in foreign countries.

We are blessed to have a beautiful sanctuary, one of the largest in Western North Dakota. But our focus is always on the future, and the role God has for us in the unfolding work of the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed. We are glad that you would consider joining us in that work, and therefore we are more hopeful than ever that our future is bright.

Again, welcome to First Lutheran Church!