



HEART MATTERS

CQ

CALVARY  **LUTHERAN CHURCH**

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FROM HANS DAHL

Your heart matters matter.

As good midwesterners, when someone asks, "How are you doing?" How do we respond? "Fine." Even though your bank account may say \$0, your kids aren't talking to you, your marriage is on the rocks, you can't stand your job and your dog ran away. "I'm fine. Everything's good here."

Everything might look good on the outside, but the condition of your heart is a whole different story.

Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," but I've always found that phrase easier said than done. Real life is filled with trouble. Real hurts, fears and struggles. Real life is messy. Unfortunately, we're led to believe the messes on our heart are signs of weakness. So, we say "fine," fiercely protecting our hearts, all the while longing for places, spaces and relationships where our heart matters matter.

As we get ready for Easter, we're going to reflect on "heart matters," because, honestly, our hearts have gotten quite the workout over the past year. They've been stretched in ways they've never been stretched, sometimes growing our hearts, other times breaking our hearts, and still other times hardening our hearts.

Our hope is that we'll not only tend to our heart matters, but we'll also discover how **having heart matters**, especially in these divisive times we live in. Living lives full of grace, not condemnation. Living curious, not closed. Flexible, not flustered. Choosing love, not hate. I pray we'll all discover what Paul suggests in Philippians 4:4-7: *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your **hearts** and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

Friends, your **heart matters matter to God.**



Pastor Hans Dahl

A NOTE FROM OUR NEW COUNCIL PRESIDENT



Welcome to 2021! The calendar has flipped and we are seeing newness all around—a new addition to the church, a new Council president, a new vaccine and how about this for something new: gathering again in-person for worship!

I'm Jana Berndt and am honored to serve as your Council President for 2021. Calvary has been my home church for 6 years, although I have attended with my parents for over 30 years. I am a mother of three grown children, Tyler (31) and partner, Trevor, in Minneapolis; Emily (27) and her husband, Mitchell, along with my first grandchild, Joelle (1), in Nashville, TN; and Matthew (24) and fiancée, Ali, in Woodbury, MN. I was married for 28 years to the love of my life, Randy who passed away in 2014.

After spending 36 years in various leadership and sales roles with Bremer Bank, I have retired to spend more time with family at our lake home in Alexandria, affectionately known as Buck Saw Lodge. I serve as the Development Director for the Richland Wilkin Community Foundation, where I've volunteered since 2000. After serving on Calvary's Council for the past 4 years, I am anxious to serve our church in this new way and ask for your prayers as we continue to lead our church through these unique, yet hopeful times.

CALVARY'S RE-GATHERING PLAN

From the beginning of the pandemic, the council established two criteria for resuming in-person worship: 1) We will gather when we can ensure the safety of all who gather, especially those most vulnerable. 2) We will gather when we can create worship experiences that you would be proud and excited to invite your friends and neighbors to. Rates of infection are declining and Covid-19 vaccinations are underway, but the roll-out is much slower than any of us would like. Given this, we will begin a phased approach to gathering again:

In February, as a first step, we hosted tours of the building and held a Backpack Attack packing event on Superbowl weekend.

In March, Connect Groups (10 people or less) are invited to reserve space for their gatherings here at the church. Connect Groups include any small groups within our church.

In April, we will begin holding public office hours when the doors will be open to daily traffic.

In May, we will host several volunteer training events to prepare for our relaunch of in-person worship. Volunteers will be essential to regathering for worship.

We will then resume in-person worship on Sundays beginning Memorial Day weekend, May 30. We can't wait to gather again offering both modern and traditional in-person worship experiences each Sunday. We know for some this timeline seems overly cautious. For others, this timeline feels aggressive or even premature. That's what we all love about Calvary. We are a diverse gathering of God's people.

Please know the Council showered these decisions in listening, prayer, and conversation. By May 30 the temperatures will be warm enough for us to worship outdoors, which frees us from capacity restrictions. This date will also give us time. Time for all of us to get vaccinated and time for us to hire a Digital Minister so we can ensure that when we return to in-person worship we can continue our high quality online and television ministry for those who may not be ready or are unable to join us in-person, those who call Calvary their home yet don't live in the Alexandria community, and for you when you are unable to join us. We are going to err on the side of caution so when we open we can do it big, and offer an experience you will be excited to attend and excited to invite your friends and neighbors to.

Grateful for my church!

Jana Berndt, Calvary Council President



Dionne Peterson, Rhonda Bowser, Kathy Lesnar, Jana Berndt, Cheryl Whitchurch, Rhonda Forkrud, Lori Anderson, Janet Getz (not pictured)

THE HEART OF CONNECTION

As a recent newcomer to Alexandria, I had attended worship at Calvary only a handful of times prior to the pandemic shut down in March 2020. Just as I was beginning to call Calvary my new church home, the church doors closed. Despite the closed doors, Calvary's online presence provided multiple opportunities to continue to connect deeply and purposefully.

A year ago, navigating the virtual world was not my skill set and not my preference. Nevertheless, I felt nudged to participate in a virtual Calvary Connect Group. New relationships developed and faith deepened as we shared the matters of our hearts and reflected upon the weekly online worship message. Through the Connect Group experience, our homes became a place where each of our lives and our faith intersected. Our homes became a space where we became more fully connected to God's strength and promises through each other. In the upheaval and uncertainty of the times, a new door was opened for authentic, caring relationships and deeper faith. I am grateful.

I believe that worship is among the most impactful of faith practices. Calvary's worship experience, both in-person and virtual, connects faith to life in very real, relatable ways. Through message and music, reflection and discussion, I am more deeply connected to God, self, family, and community. While apart, I was able to share my Calvary worship experience with my grown children. My youngest son and his fiancée connected to Calvary through online worship. As a result, they are coming home to the midwest from Arizona to be married this summer...at Calvary. My oldest son and I were able to share a Calvary Christmas Eve candlelight worship service, knowing that our gathering of two was a part of a larger silent and holy night. Just as the church is our home, I believe our home is also the church. Calvary's online presence has provided resources for all of us to make the space of our home the church. A space where faith is deepened and love is strengthened.

While apart, Calvary's online ministry has been a bridge connecting me more deeply and fully to a vibrant faith community. Like everyone else, I am looking forward to future connections. I am excited for a family wedding, worship at the lake, and meeting a new faith family in-person!

Cheryl Whitchurch

A PEACEFUL HEART

In March of 2020, my world as a restaurant owner was turned upside down. When businesses were shut down, I remember going home to my wife Rita and squashing my anger and fears in order to help soothe the anxiety she was feeling. Honestly, my own heart was broken. The next day I woke up, brewed my coffee, and started to develop a plan.

My plan began with prayer. I prayed for direction. I prayed that my fear and anger would be washed away. Due to the often toxic rhetoric being displayed on social media and throughout the world, I prayed for the Lord to give me a positive role in what felt like an upside down world. I felt a sense of calm after those prayers and I followed the path laid before me.

I was guided to speak truth, unity and common sense to our community. I never really envisioned stepping out into the community in such a way, but I have been moved so many times by the words and actions of others around me, including our faith leaders at Calvary and others I have met in this community. I was also guided to give. I have always felt that when you give, you will receive more in return, and that has definitely been the case during this pandemic.



Our hearts are the most precious gift we can extend to others. It is easy to become dismayed by the conflict, unrest and anger we see on a national level. Yet, when we look within our own community we can see these gifts of the heart all around us. In my case, I was inspired to step forward by these gifts and through prayer. My heart was touched and I chose to pay it forward.

Kent Kopp

"Our hearts are the most precious gift we can extend to others."

HEALING HEARTS WITH MUSIC

As humans, our natural instinct is to hide the parts of us that are messy. Our struggles. Our failures. We put armor on as a way to protect ourselves from judgement, but what this version of ourselves really does is protect our hearts from healing. From love. From forgiveness. This armor can actually hide us from the most important parts of ourselves. This is the biggest lesson I learned in 2020 and now, in 2021, I am finally trying to connect to the one thing I have spent so long trying to disconnect from...myself.

When the Covid-19 pandemic began last spring, I made a huge career change; I went from teaching high school choir for eight years to becoming a therapeutic musician for Knute Nelson Hospice. This path led me to re-evaluate how I connected with myself, and others, and it also forced me to shed the armor I had always worn. As I have experienced the classes in the Music for Healing & Transition program to become a Certified Music Practitioner, I realized that in order to succeed in this new career, I had to open myself up to the hurt and pain I've always shied away from.



We practice heart-centered awareness and vulnerability in every session. We are actually encouraged to show our broken hearts to our patients daily. So, I had to shed this armor and reveal my wounds. Depression. Anxiety. Anorexia. Chronic Illness. Trauma. I felt exposed and weak and scared. I felt inferior. But God did not put our beautiful souls on this planet so that we could listen to the enemy in our minds tell us that we aren't good enough.

Because of this, every time I sing for a patient, especially when they are in their last hours of life, I expose my heart to them and to God. I connect with Him in a way I never have before, through the music I am singing and through the wonderful patients I know. My voice is a God-given gift and I am so blessed and thankful that I am able to use it to help and heal others. I did not see this positive outlook in the midst of the struggle; I was deep in the valley of doubt. However, I was able to trust God with my heart and my life, knowing that He would never fail me. He forced me into an uncomfortable situation and, in working through it, He healed my shattered heart and showed me a new part of myself I never knew existed.

Nikki Mattfeld

GRATEFUL HEARTS

If 2020 wasn't bad enough, our family found out first hand things can always be worse. Our lives were turned upside down on the afternoon of July 7th. Troy had a bad motorcycle accident leaving many things in life to question. It made us stop and think about what's really important in life. It's definitely not material things but who you have in your life that matters.



We have been blessed with the outpouring support from so many. We received gifts of love in lots of different ways. From getting things like meals, calls, texts, cards, and donations, you easily feel the love. We had friends and family step up to help out with caring for Izaya and Hazel. That allowed Chelsie to be at the hospital with Troy. We were blessed with two doctors close to home to tackle Troy's injuries sustained during the accident. He also had

amazing nurses, doctors and therapists that cared for him and all played an important role in his recovery. Troy has faith and determination which allowed him to be discharged a week earlier than anticipated.

We continue to face many difficult decisions, and ask God to guide us to the path He knows will be best for our family. Some days are easier than others, but we know through the pain and tears God will show us His love.

We have seen God's love for us through the people He has put in our lives. Our family at Calvary has been so thoughtful and supportive. We are truly blessed with a wonderful congregation. We appreciate all the continued prayers.

The Lueths (Troy, Chelsie, Izaya and Hazel)

"We continue to face many difficult decisions, and ask God to guide us to the path He knows will be best for our family."



CARING FOR YOUNG HEARTS

Being part of the church all my life, I've often heard pastors talk about their calling. I also heard it in the movie *Sister Act*, but I think Whoopi Goldberg's character was just as confused about "being called" as I was. That is until I realized that the youth have my heart. I've been drawn to them ever since I was in college. I mentored students on the Red Lake Indian Reservation, became a Big Sister to my Little Sister Sami, and have had the honor of mentoring 2 students during confirmation.

While pregnant with my first, I started leading 3rd grade Sunday School and today I help lead our 4th & 5th grade Impact youth group. You see, all these youth have my heart.

"Sometimes it felt overwhelming or heavy on my heart making time for supporting our youth. It was trying when they'd share stories of struggle and left me wondering what more I could do. The Lord examined my heart and my mind and opened it to them."

Psalm 26:6 reads, "Test me, LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind." Our Great God did just that. Sometimes it felt overwhelming or heavy on my heart making time for supporting our youth. It was trying when they'd share stories of struggle and left me wondering what more I could do. The Lord examined my heart and my mind and opened it to them. They have a lot to say, they have a lot on their hearts, and that matters! Big or small, it matters!

Our youth are our future and let me tell you, the future's looking bright. In just our group alone, we have youth that generously donated money from their piggybank to those in need. When given monetary gifts for Christmas, they selflessly spent that money to create gift bags for hospitalized children. They hand wrote letters during Christmas to our shut-in members and this summer will step into a leadership role as Jr. Leaders during Vacation Bible School. You see, for our youth, hearts matter.

I would encourage you to turn off the evening news, and check in with a young person in your life. Not sure what to say? Ask them about their highs, lows and God spots. We do this each time we gather with our Impact youth group. It's a chance for us to celebrate the good, be there for them during the bad, and make sure they recognize when God is working in their lives. It's our job...our calling, to be there for our youth; to listen, to guide, to shape, to love.

I'll leave with a verse I share with our youth often from 1 Timothy 4:12:

"Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but be an example for the believers in your speech, your conduct, your love, faith, and purity."

Alicia Bertram

REFLECTIONS FROM THE HEART

During my time as a reading teacher, Michael snuggled close as I listened to him read. 'This is just like home,' he said. 'Really? How so?' I wondered. 'Well, we have fun, we do stuff, we read, we play, we sing, we eat, and everybody likes me.' Michael was right! School is not just a building. It is people developing relationships, learning, and growing together.



Likewise, church is not the building. It is the family of believers who come together for worship, fellowship, learning, and growing in friendship and faith. Our church family provides encouragement and support. As newer members of Calvary, Dick and I were finding the men's and women's Bible studies a great way to dig into God's word, make friends and enjoy fellowship with our new church family. As we experienced the friendship, encouragement and support of Calvary's members, it began to feel like home.

Covid-19 precautions made social distancing necessary. Not seeing friends at church, worshipping together, or sharing spiritual insights left a void. The on-line services and Daily Dose are wonderful, yet I missed the personal connections. While sharing from my heart as I wrote notes to stay in touch with some friends, I had a thought—perhaps it was a God-wink. What if I shared devotions with the Calvary Women's group as a way to encourage and connect with others?

Reading, reflecting, and sharing insights from God's Word is an amazing experience, giving me a new sense of purpose. The Holy Spirit faithfully provides ideas. Responses from the women have been insightful and encouraging, and some tell me they forward the devotions to others. Who but God could use Covid-19 restrictions and email to make heart to heart connections?! Nothing is impossible for God!

Elaine Simpson

LEARNING IN THE HEART OF ALEXANDRIA

One look around the active, colorful classrooms at Calvary Preschool and you'll know that this is a place where heart matters. From the warm, friendly smiles of the teachers to the soft giggles of little children, it is clearly a place filled with love. Since the start of the pandemic, Calvary Preschool has been safely opened for the children in our community to receive an excellent education and learn about the love of Jesus. Currently serving 54 families, it has been a joy to see this vibrant ministry of Calvary continue to grow throughout a challenging year.

Kristi Van Ahn-Kjeseth has had two daughters attend Calvary Preschool, and her youngest daughter will start there this fall. Kristi describes Calvary Preschool as "one giant hug." Elaborating, she says, "Every day our children were excited to go to school and that enthusiasm lasted until we picked them up. When our middle daughter needed additional services through an IEP at the school district, Calvary Preschool worked wonderfully with the school district to make sure her needs were met both for her services and her help needed at Calvary Preschool. This confirmed our beliefs that our children were in the perfect learning environment."

John Flatt is on his third child to attend Calvary Preschool, and agrees that matters of the heart are incredibly important. "We wanted our children to be in a preschool that not only prepared them for their education, but also had the message of God's love for them. As members of Calvary, they have received that consistent message with people that love them."

Kristi adds that Calvary Preschool has helped her children "grow in a deeper understanding that God loves them. They know that God loves them deeply and for exactly the person they are."

As we think about Calvary's mission to lead all people to a lifelong faith in Jesus Christ, we see that playing out every day at Calvary Preschool. Like the Psalmist says, *God is the strength of our hearts and our portion forever.* What a beautiful demonstration of that in our preschool children.

If you'd like to learn more about Calvary Preschool, visit our website at www.calvaryalex.org/preschool.





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