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104 First Street North
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On the occasion of Immanuel's 150th Anniversary June 27th - 29th , 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,

With great joy and love Cindy and I remember our time at Immanuel in Swea City. When we talk about our time with you, there are so many great memories of God's blessings shared among us. God did so many great works – the grace of God that blesses through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

What first comes to mind are the memories of our first days. These bring smiles and good warm feelings of the love and expectations that new ministry brings. I recall Paul Preston's anxiety of getting a pastor installed in time for the wedding of Erin (Preston) and Tony Brown. That was a great wedding to remember and Erin and Tony blessed Paul and Jane with their first grandchildren as they were blessed – to be fruitful and multiply. We remember the parsonage was not quite ready at first, but Earl and Elsie were most gracious welcoming Cindy and I into their home across the street from the Church. (I wonder if Elsie's curb row of red tulips still bloom as a welcome to spring – a lovely memorial to her memory) Of course during our time there Else and Earl told us the history of Swea City, at least all according to the Kamsdale's. The best Kamsdale memory though, is the miracle healing of Earl when he had that staff infection, in 2008. I was in Ghana, Africa with Reaching the Unreached. Cindy emailed me Earl's critical need, and being at a mission training event with 27 African pastors, we all prayed for Earl. I am still amazed at the intensity and genuineness of their prayers. When I returned I discovered that Earl had recovered from this tribulation the same hour we were praying in Africa. Of course Elsie had it all written down in her notebook – she was a great records keeper. Earl said it felt like someone had poured a bucket of cold water over him from head to toe. This set the tone for the rest of Cindy and my ministry, and I pray that this healing faith still abides with you. In truth when the name of Jesus is confessed and all truly believe that all things are possible through him God will do amazing things from the congregation.

There are many other great memories of the grace we shared. When we first arrived Ruben and Lois Holcome invited us over to meet some of you, and Cindy and I could not find their house – the number was right but the sign on the front said Velcomen, and we were looking for the Holcombes. (and yes we still have a good laugh at this too) I loved the name Ruben's

grandchildren gave him - “grandpa Pig”. They had sold their farm and moved to town just before we arrived. The Johnsons, Mildred and Morris told us of the missionaries who the congregation had accommodated in the 1940’s and 50’s and it was a great surprise when a family member would stop by unannounced. It was such a blessing living in that 100 year old house and we often had spiritual visitors drift through - saints from the years past. Of course who can forget Loretta Walker, she informed me of how everything needed to be in order – well Loretta – bless her heart – she was one of a kind. I loved to visit the senior center and there the conversations were always interesting and a jigsaw puzzle was in work. I think Jim Koonts and Amery Charleston had some of the best history debates. It was a joy to hear all that use not to be from those two. Iris always told me if you want to know something about Kossuth County just ask Jim. Amery was my hair-cut buddy and every couple of weeks or so we would drive over to Ledyard and get our hair cut – Pat still gave a 5 dollar haircut and those of you who remember Amery know he had the first dime he ever made. Vivian was a saint to put up with his shenanigans all those years. I still think most would not know it was Amery who put the stuffed rabbit in Sandy Hazelhoff rabbit trap. Sandy went to his grave not knowing, according to Bernie. Simple things, like Joel Stephens coming over to cut the lawn and we would sit on the porch and sip some brew and just talk about the weather. And of course the annual events such as the Lefse party (those couple of week, lots of potatoes, lots of fellowship. Community VBS was always a success, I still remember all the props and of course Craig Deim as Mr. Science, and who can forget Jacob Bradock making Mr. Box Man come alive. This is the living history that makes a Church part of the community and becomes a home. This is living in faithfulness, abiding in the will of God, being a community and family, and for the years Cindy and I served Immanuel, this was our home.

Baptisms and weddings were our greatest blessings through these years- by my count we were blessed with 29 weddings and each wedding was very special, lovely brides and anxious grooms. We were blessed with 3 Preston, Lee and Sheryl’s daughter Laura, and Erin, and Chad’s for Paul and Jane. Jerrod and Sara were married by her father – which was a very blessed event also. The Stevens family blessed us with Travis and Courtney’s and Chris and Tiffiany’s, there are just too many to list all but just to mention a few. Justin and Paige had the only outdoor wedding on the front Lawn, most memorable, a monarch butterfly lit on Paige’s bouquet as she was taking her vows, and of course the horse drawn carriage – it was a wow occasion. Both the Nyman girls honored us with their weddings, the Richardson’s, Priesters’, Bauer’s, Dahl’s, these being just some of those happy times. Baptisms seemed to follow weddings – my favorite wedding blessing – be fruitful and multiply and it seems the Lord has blessed Immanuel with the next generation to carry on the faith. I loved presiding at the weddings and baptisms, I very intentionally did all I could to make them very special to you, and I pray that was so, for such blessings gives glory to the Lord our God.

The blessings of ministry were many, and I pray for Immanuel and the community. The focus of my ministry has been and always will be The Word of God, for “Faith comes by hearing

and hearing by the Word of Christ.” (Rom 10:17) I did my best to see that you were well versed in the SOLA’S – SOLA GRATIA – SOLA FIDE – SOLA CHRISTUS – SOLA DEO GLORIA. I love to tell the story, and to teach and preach about the grace of God through Jesus Christ is my calling and passion. I do not know if you know but in my years with you we were able to go through the whole bible 4 times – Genesis through Revelation. I see bible study and preaching as the great jig-saw puzzle. We see this scene in the garden, and then complete it as the rainbow comes to completion in the new heavens and earth of The Revelation. God has blessed us through the Words of Scripture – the Word made flesh – and in Christ we learn about the love of God and the salvation given to all who believe in Jesus Christ. I sometimes wonder how all was received, but then the Lord brings to my memory all the blessings that were so varied and came about in so many ways. As I was blessed by your faith so I shared with you and the community. Immanuel enjoyed being one of the first LCMC congregations, thanks to Pr. Ken Wallace, and our relationship with LCMC during my years certainly was a blessing to many even beyond our borders. We were there for the founding of the LCMC Iowa District and this allowed us a fellowship during those first years of LCMC. At the 2004 LCMC gathering in Altoona, your call allowed me to be a part of addressing the pastoral need of LCMC congregations in the founding of Beyond the River Academy. This was established to provide pastoral candidates with a Master of Divinity equivalent, that they would be equipped to provide pastoral ministry to their calling congregation. During my 12 year tenure with BTRA I taught 85 students through the New Testament Course – many of whom are still serving their congregations today. In our early time together we revised our Church Constitution to agree with the LCMC theology of Priesthood of all believers, and the freedom in Christ the Scriptures teach. Our constitution became one of the first adopted by LCMC as a sample for Lutheran congregations seeking to join our association. I still use it – though amended a little to address issues of the years – as an example to the congregations I have served as an Intentional Interim – my retirement ministry calling the Lord has designated. In all, LCMC has been a blessing to Immanuel, allowing you, the Immanuel Congregation, to seek the will of God as the body of Christ – no longer in bondage to sin but free in Christ – to the glory of God.

The Swea City Ministerial Association is a true blessing for the community. As the psalm says, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” (Ps. 133:1 ESV) The community partnership between our local congregations has blessed you with a local food pantry and family need resources. The community teen youth group was a place where young believers could experience Godly relationships, many of which I hope have survive the years. (the chili cook offs were always interesting to this Texan). The community worship events united the community in a way where Jesus has worked among you to the better of the community. I really loved our worship in the Park, and the Lenten dinners in the assisted living dining room. This association brought your city pastors together, so that we were able to provide a solid community ministry that benefited the whole community, reaching out even those few who did not come to worship services. I pray that the fellowship that I experienced during my time with you

continues from pastor to pastor, that ministry in Jesus Christ remains a solid foundation in Swea City.

Cindy was ordained into Word and Sacrament Ministry in June of 2022 and continues to serve Emmanuel Lutheran in Inez, Texas. Her ministry, as you would know, is being blessed in many ways to the glory of God making disciples and affirming the congregation. The congregation is finding new life as the Lord provides children, young and old with a new commitment to the work of Jesus Christ. I am in my 5th Interim, serving Holy Cross Lutheran in Yoakum, Texas. As to our family, we have been blessed to be near 11 of our 14 grandchildren, and now 4 great grandchildren. The Lord has protected our health, aside from the usual aging issues that we all suffer, but His grace is sufficient and we serve as we have been called. Service does not cease with retirement, and I have discovered retirement means you can slow down and yet not neglect the work of the Lord – there are many ways to make disciples.

I cannot close without sharing from the scriptures. Let me start with the words of St Paul from his letter to the Philippians. The Apostle wrote; “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

I cannot say this any better. We shared a great ministry, and God blessed us abundantly. It is in the continuance of the faith, exhibited by good works, inspired and continued through a genuine love for God the Father, in Christ Jesus our Lord, loving one another, fulfilling the Commandments of Christ that we live a fulfilled life. Make your joy be in the Lord, love one another seeking always to do good as you would pray the Lord would bless you.

I continue using the Apostle’s words, adapting them to what I want to share with you -

It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my ministry as we shared there with you and in the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ teaching and proclaiming the gospel. For God is my witness, how I pray for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (From Phil. 1:7-11 ESV)

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:20-21 ESV)

May God richly bless you my beloved,

Pastor Rusty