

The Petra Press

Newsletter of the Williamstown Lutheran Church

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Pastor's Corner

Newsletter Article – June 4, 2026

Blessings in the name of our risen Lord.

We just celebrated the Feast of the Holy Trinity in Church. And one of the traditions for Trinity Sunday is to use the third of the three ecumenical creeds to which we Lutheran subscribe, namely, the Athanasian Creed. Normally, we use the Apostles' Creed on non-communion Sundays and the Nicene Creed on communion Sundays (the first two of the ecumenical creeds), but on Trinity Sunday we traditionally use the Athanasian Creed, and over the years, I've noticed that I usually get a question or two from people when we use it. I find the questions to be an opportunity to teach. Not everybody is familiar with "creeds" in general, and the Athanasian Creed in specific.

Now a creed is simply a statement of faith. The word "creed" comes from the Latin word "credo" which means "I believe." All of the documents in the Book of Concord, the statements that define the Lutheran faith, are creeds, even if they don't start with the words "I believe." Other words that are used that are used in place of "creed" are "symbol" or even a "confession of faith."

During the time of the Lutheran Reformation, the reformers wanted to explicitly make the point that their teachings were not a break from the ancient church, but that they upheld the teachings that have always been held and attempted to recover the teachings of the universal Christian Church. The three ecumenical creeds (ecumenical means "affirmed by the entire church") are part of that and that's why they are in the Book of Concord and serve as part of our confession of faith.

The Athanasian Creed is much longer than the other two and particularly goes into greater detail in describing the doctrine of the Trinity. That's why we use it on Trinity Sunday.

One thing that I sometimes hear (though I must say that I haven't heard it in Vermont yet) is, "Pastor, but it's so loooooong." The question is often accompanied by a groan. And I have to agree. The Athanasian Creed is longer. That's because it describes in greater detail the doctrine of the Trinity. That's why we use it.

Now in my younger days, I would have been much more sympathetic to the questioner and tried to describe at length the benefit of considering, at least once a year, the mystery of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity for a few more minutes and in greater detail. But I've come to think that this particular issue is much ado about nothing. It takes about a minute to confess the Nicene Creed. It takes, maybe, five minutes to confess the Athanasian Creed. That's a four-minute difference. Personally, I think that the benefits far outweigh the cost.

So, I guess that I'm less sympathetic these days. Now that I've gotten older and probably grumpier, my response would be closer to, "Don't worry. Four minutes won't kill you. You'll still beat the Baptists to The Wayside." The point is that time shouldn't be our main issue on Sunday morning, especially when we're talking about our confession of faith. Both what my younger and older self say is true. It's a well-spent, four extra minutes.

Another question that I sometimes hear has to do with the first sentence of the Creed that goes, "Whoever wants to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith." The word "catholic" sometimes sticks in the throats of Lutherans because it's the name of another denomination. But notice that the word in the Athanasian Creed begins with a little "c." The word "catholic" actually means "universal."

We confess that we are members of the One, Holy, Universal Church in Jesus Christ. There is no other. It is the Priesthood of All Believers in Jesus wherever they are found in the world. And we don't have to give up the word "catholic" just because it has gotten pre-empted by specific denominations. Instead, by using the term on Trinity Sunday, we are reclaiming the proper usage of the term. We Lutherans are members of the Church catholic.

In many English translations, and in the common usage of our other creeds, the word "Christian" is used to replace the word "catholic." If you look in our hymnal in the liturgies where we confess that we believe in "the Holy Christian Church," you'll notice a note at the bottom that says, "Christian: the ancient text reads 'catholic,' meaning the whole Church as it confesses the wholeness of Christian doctrine.

I hope that helps if you have had some of the same questions. Please feel free to ask me anything else that's on your mind about the Athanasian Creed. I'll speak some more next month about the one other common question that I've heard over the years.

See you in church.

In Christ,
Pastor Stephen Sweyko

Newsletter Article – July 6, 2026

Blessings in the name of our risen Lord.

Last month, I wrote about some questions that people sometimes have when we confess together the Athanasian Creed on the Feast of the Holy Trinity. Last month, we spoke about the length of the creed, and the fact that the word “catholic” is used to define the church. As far as length is concerned, it’s really not as long as some people think. And the word “catholic” means “universal.” We do confess one, holy, “universal,” apostolic Church.

This month, I’m going to address a statement at the end of the creed which sometimes raises some questions. This is the part speaking of our Lord’s return on the last day.

“At His coming all people will rise again with their bodies and give an account concerning their own deeds. And those who have done good will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil into eternal fire.”

LCMS. Lutheran Service Book: Pew Edition (p. 320). Concordia Publishing House.

The question often goes something like this, “Pastor, I thought we were saved by grace through faith, it’s the gift of God to us in Jesus Christ. What’s this thing about being judged based on my good or evil works. Does this mean that I have to earn my way to heaven? Doesn’t this place me back under the Law instead of giving me the hope of Gospel?” That’s a very good question.

But before I answer and resolve the tension, please understand that this statement in the Athanasian Creed is fully biblical. It’s found in many places in the New Testament. There’s John 5:28-29, “Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice (29) and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” There’s Romans 2:6-8 “He will render to each one according to his works: (7) to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; (8) but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.” There’s 2 Corinthians 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” It’s not like this idea being judged based on what we have done, which is found in the Athanasian Creed, is something new.

But neither is a passage which is often quoted amongst us. And that’s what we find in St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: Ephesians 2:8-9 “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And

this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, (9) not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” However, we sometimes forget to quote the next verse, verse 10: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

The very second that we come to faith in Jesus Christ, the very instant that the Holy Spirit creates in us a clean heart that trusts in the life, merits and salvation given to us in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit also works in us “to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Phil 2:13). Faith always bears its fruit. We call this “fruits of the Spirit.” it’s visible fruit. And we may not always even be aware that we’re doing it.

Do you remember the story that Jesus tells of the last day where the Son of Man comes in His glory and all of the nations are separated as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats? “And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. (34) Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’” (Matthew 25:33-34). And then Jesus lists off a bunch of things that the blessed did to the “least of these my brothers.” And “then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry....’” They ask, “When did we do this stuff, these works?” They don’t even know. But they did them. They were bearing fruit, good fruit, fruit of the Holy Spirit. They did this because they trusted in Jesus, and for that, they were welcomed into the kingdom of heaven.

Got Faith? Got Fruit. No Fruit? No Faith? (Jas: 17). It’s that simple.

And so, we need not worry about the judgement. Instead, we cling to our Lord Jesus Christ who has worked for us the gift of salvation and worked in us, through His Holy Spirit, the gift of faith. Faith always bears its fruit. We need not worry. In fact, we long for that day to finally arrive. Come, Lord Jesus.

See you in church.

In Christ,
Pastor Stephen Swayko

Celebration of Mike Schumacher's life

In July we gathered for the celebration of life/funeral for our dear brother in Christ, Mike Schumacher. Mike's art work was on display and there was potluck after the service.

Thank you for everyone who helped with potluck planning, set up, clean up, and those bringing in food.

Leftovers were sent home with Mike's family.

Meal Train for the Bev and Eric Schumacher:

We are starting a meal train for Bev and Eric, more information will be sent out soon. Meals can be brought in on Sunday for delivery to Bev and Eric. We will have a sign up.

Support for Bev and Eric:

Bev's son Joel has set up a registry for monetary donations for Bev and Eric. You can find it at [Supportnow.org](https://www.Supportnow.org) and look up Bev and Eric Schumacher.

OTHER NEWS

Church Bi-Weekly Cleaning:

Believe it or not, we don't have little magical elves that keep things running (well maybe we do but we don't want to burn them out). There will be sign up sheet in the narthex for Volunteers for Church Cleaning every other week. Duties include clean bathrooms, empty trash, be sure supplies are out, vacuuming the narthex and sanctuary, tidying up the pews (clean out bulletins, be sure hymnals and bibles are set up in each pew, dusting, etc). If you are physically able to do this work it will be greatly appreciated if you could volunteer your time. If we keep up with it only an hour or so every other week is needed. With enough volunteers this won't fall on the shoulders of just a few. A big thank you to Karen for all the work she does to keep things clean.

Supplies:

A supply list will be set out for you to note any supplies that need to be picked up (toilet paper, paper towels, plates, plastic ware, cups, cleaning supplies, etc). If you see something is needed please note it on this list. Our elves will make a trip to BJ's or Costco to pick up supplies once a month.



Thank you: KL

Thank You:

A big Thank You to Janet for mowing the lawn.

Thank you Karen for keeping the church clean.

Thank you to Saoise Chin and Maddie Laughlin (and their Moms) for planting new flowers in the flower pots In July.

**August Newsletter deadline**

Deadline for August is Thursday August 6. Thanks!