

Welcome to the April 2025 Issue, and Happy Easter!

This April issue of *Church and Life* opens with a question: Can you name the church where the picture to the right was taken? (You can find the answer later in this issue.) In anticipation of Easter, Brad Busbee offers a translation and commentary of an Easter hymn by N.F.S. Grundtvig. Pastor Lars Ottosen of Sankt Jakobs Kirke in Copenhagen, Denmark, shares a "Skærtorsdag" (Maundy Thursday) homily. Avery Means authors this issue's feature story about the African-American and Danish author Nella Larsen, and Reagan Gage profiles pastor and current DIC president Andrés Albertsen. Also in this month's issue, Edward Broadbridge reports from Denmark about the Danish monarchy. Anita Young shares an update about the 79th Annual Danebod Folk Meeting this August 20-24th. We close the April issue by celebrating the lives of Theodore Johannes Thuesen, Jr., and Richard N. Juhl and with a postscript by the editor.

We would like to make two requests of our readers: First, please see the list of recent gifts to Church and Life, as of April 2025. We are grateful for these expressions of generosity and support. And, second, the June issue will feature stories about how communities around the USA celebrate midsummer. Please share your stories and pictures about the summer traditions in your community by emailing us at Churchandlife1952@gmail.com. Thank you for your support!

“Christ rose up from the dead!” (Krist stod op af døde)

A hymn by N.F.S. Grundtvig (1815/1845)

Christ rose up from the dead
On Easter morn's skies of red!
People sing aloud their praise
and soulful joy in every place:
Glory be to God in the highest!

Christ rose up from the dead,
To save us from shame and dread!
People sing aloud their praise
and soulful joy in every place:
Glory be to God in the highest!

Christ rose up from the dead,
We'll meet him in heaven ahead!
People sing aloud their praise
and soulful joy in every place:
Glory be to God in the highest!

Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia!
People sing aloud their praise
and soulful joy in every place:
Glory be to God in the highest!

Commentary on "Christ rose up from the dead!"

Grundtvig translated "Krist stod op af døde" for the first time in 1815, during his "historical" period when he was beginning his translation projects on medieval texts like the Old English epic Beowulf. The oldest original version of the hymn dates from 12th century Germany; its title was "Christ ist erstanden," and it is probably the oldest liturgical song in the German language. Scholars note that the hymn inspired Martin Luther to write "Christ lag in Todes Banden" (Christ lay in the bonds of death) and that he derived his melody from the medieval hymn.

Grundtvig's version remains one of the most popular Danish Easter hymns today; it is still a mainstay as number 218 in the Danish Hymnbook. The question is: How do these historical points add to the beauty of this well-known hymn? And the answer: They signal Grundtvig's emphasis on the Living Word and the community of Christians through time and across space. Grundtvig translated the hymn so that it maintained its medieval flavor. The verse is sung three times, and in a single line, the variation breaks the sense of repetition and creates a progressive song of praise. We can imagine what Grundtvig intended: that Christians everywhere would be singing this ancient hymn in a unified expression of devotion.

You can hear the hymn on the web version of *Church and Life*.

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Skærtorsdag Homily

By Lars Ottosen of [Sankt Jakobs Kirke](#), Copenhagen, Denmark

For "Maundy Thursday" – April 17, 2025

Maundy Thursday. . . The night of Jesus' final meal. The Last Supper. It's an image that modernity continues to revisit and preserve. The picture of Jesus sitting at the table with his disciples [as imagined above by Leonardo da Vinci] has been reimagined time and again. New books explore its symbolism, new mysteries surround the making of Leonardo da Vinci's painting, and Hollywood still makes movies filling cinemas around the world.

It's a scene that continues to fire the imagination of people all over the world. The Son of God, seated at a table He will soon rise from—to be betrayed by a friend, to be abandoned

by God and by those closest to Him. And perhaps because of that abandonment, He becomes more the Son of God than ever before.

It's a reminder: the darkness is real, but the light will rise. Resurrection. Hope. For all of us. Because life, especially life with others, can be hard. Community can divide. It can shut people out, push some down while lifting others up. Society is often a system of difference—a world that measures, categorizes, and highlights every distinction. The philosopher Jean Paul Sartre wrote, "Hell is other people." Hell is being no one. The one nobody likes. The one betrayed by a neighbor. That's our primal fear: to be left alone—an infant, or a grown adult—with no one to care for us.

The boxer Willie Pep once said about life in the ring: "First you lose your footwork. Then your reflexes. And finally, your friends." That's true of life, too. First we lose our youthful health. Then our strength. And eventually—our friends.

Jesus skipped the first two stages. He died young. But His friends—those He lived long enough to lose. The Last Supper is Jesus saying goodbye. It's also the moment He centers the meal as the heart of the Spirit's work in the church that we are part of today.

The greatest gift we can offer one another is ourselves. And that's what God does every time we gather at the Lord's table. At a table, you are shaped not only by what you say and hear—but by the food you pass, the space you make, the dignity you offer others. Good table fellowship gives voice and honor to everyone. Hospitality isn't just the work of the host—it's the responsibility of everyone at the table. A shared meal is a civilizing act of spirit and community—played out every day, in every society, all over the world.

Because barbarism exists. We see it in Ukraine. We see images of death. We see Ukrainians giving their lives—for their families, their nation, and their freedom.

And before Jesus walks into death Himself, He makes a meal. Not just as an example of how to live with one another—but to establish a new covenant. A new relationship between God and humanity. A relationship where God places Himself at our mercy—surrenders to our freedom.

Disagreement, dialogue, and the right to speak your mind—these are the cornerstones of any free and democratic society. Jesus didn't come to build a world full of bitter, silent tables where people glare at each other over their food. He came to show us that God is real in our everyday lives.

And along the way, there must be eating and drinking, talking and debating. One of Jesus' most beautiful human qualities was His joy in sitting down to eat—not just with friends, but with strangers. That joy, that table fellowship, became one of the church's sacred acts.

Other religions have detailed food laws and rituals surrounding everyday meals. Christianity also gives food a sacred place—but differently. We don't have daily rules around eating. Instead, we take the meal into the very heart of worship.

The Eucharist says: Embrace life with all its beauty. Delight in it. Take it, taste it, and pass it on—to others—as light, and life, and joy.

And in this moment—when war again rages in Europe, when new global tensions are rising, when even American leadership feels uncertain—it is so important to remember: The idea of equal worth for every human being is at the very center of the Christian faith. This is the dignity we are baptized into—the grace we meet again and again at Christ's table.

Maundy Thursday reminds us to dare to believe that community can be held together by the grace God pours into our cups and gives to us in the bread—through His Son. The one who was betrayed, and who lost Himself—but returned in Spirit and in forgiveness.

And no war, no fear, no uncertainty can shake that faith. The word “Skær” (in Denmark Maundy Thursday is called Skærtorsdag) comes from the old word for “clean.” On this day, Jesus bent to wash Peter's feet, and Peter didn't understand. He was confused, maybe even ashamed. But Jesus wanted him to feel clean—not dirty. Because Jesus knew that life can be tough. He knew how society divides. He knew how people are sorted and measured and excluded.

But He also knew—it doesn't have to be this way. He knew faith can set us free. He knew we don't have to play out life on a stage where all the roles are locked in place.

A table can offer hope for the future. A sustainable future. A future where we can laugh at ourselves and each other—and not mean harm. A future where we bring our doubts—to God's table, to one another. Even our doubts about God, and about ourselves, are welcome here.

When Jesus broke the bread and lifted the cup, He knew He was giving Himself to us—as Spirit, as forgiveness, as communion.

A table can gather energies. And we need that now—when the world's energies are scattered and dangerous. Because food should never divide. It should create identity and togetherness for those gathered—and never hostility toward those who eat differently. A meal should gather the energies of God and humanity—into one shared prism, one that catches the light of the table—and shines it forward in hope.

We're good at washing our own hands. And when politicians mess up, there's always a line at the metaphorical sink. But Maundy Thursday isn't about self-congratulation. It's a lesson in mercy. First from God. Then, through us.

Are we perfect? No, we are not. Will we get our feet washed every day? Probably not. But we can be something for someone else. We can pass the bread. We can pour the wine. We can pass on freedom.

In the end, maybe it's the invisible wine—that mysterious joy—that's the real miracle. That we can all feel the rush of life in our blood, when we open our hearts to the world and to one another. Making wine is, in many ways, like becoming yourself in community. A grape, like a person, only makes sense in relation to others. To be yourself with others is a lifelong, dynamic process. The grape is crushed. Jesus is broken.

And both return—as wine, as joy, as faith, as hope, and as love.

Amen.

“Between Two Worlds- Nella Larsen”, By Avery Means

What does it mean to belong? The search for identity and fulfillment in community while drifting between two worlds is both a burden and a longing—a restless tide that pulls some toward home and pushes others toward the unknown. This tension shaped the life and work of Nella Larsen, an American novelist whose heritage and experiences left her suspended between cultures, never fully embraced by one world or the other.

Born in Chicago in 1891 to a Danish mother and an Afro-Caribbean father, Larsen's racial identity set her apart from the predominantly white Danish immigrant community in which she was raised. After her father's death, her mother remarried a Danish man, further isolating Larsen within a family and society that could never fully understand her position. This sense of unbelonging followed her throughout her life, shaping her relationships, her career, and most notably, her writing.

Nowhere is this more poignantly explored than in *Quicksand* (1928), a novel that closely mirrors Larsen's own search for identity. Its protagonist, Helga Crane, wrestles with the same uncertainty and is torn between the expectations of society and the desires of her own heart. Like Larsen, Helga is a woman of mixed heritage, caught between two worlds yet never truly at home in either.

Helga begins the novel as a teacher at Naxos, a fictionalized version of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, where she feels suffocated by the rigid expectations of Black respectability, imposed externally by the culture of the Jim Crow South. Disillusioned, she embarks on a journey—one that takes her from the conservative South to the progressive intellectual circles of Harlem, to the cosmopolitan elegance of Copenhagen, and finally back to the restrictive confines of Black womanhood in America.

Each move Helga makes offers the illusion of a fresh start, yet every new environment ultimately leaves her unfulfilled. Harlem's artistic and intellectual circles give her a taste of freedom, but she soon becomes disenchanted with what she perceives to be performative progressivism instead of true activism.

Unsatisfied with life in Harlem, she considers leaving for Denmark.

"She began to make plans and to dream delightful dreams of change of life somewhere else, someplace where she would be permanently satisfied. . . She let herself drop into blissful sensation of visualizing herself in different strange places among approving, admiring people where she would be appreciated and understood" (59).

But in Denmark, she experiences a different kind of alienation, treated as an exotic spectacle rather than an accepted equal. Even marriage and religion, which she turns to in desperation, fail to provide lasting fulfillment.

Larsen's writing captures the ache of feeling foreign in every space, unable to assimilate yet unable to completely reject any one identity. *Quicksand* is not just a novel about Helga Crane—it is Larsen's own frustrations laid bare, her critique of the limited roles available to Black women, her reflection on the dissonance of being both an outsider and an insider.

For Larsen, Denmark may have represented a refuge, an escape from American racial divisions, yet it was never truly home. At the same time, the Harlem Renaissance—though a space for Black intellectual and artistic expression—never fully embraced her either. Helga's experiences in *Quicksand* reflect this same struggle: her desire for belonging, her distress with every place she hopes will offer it, and her eventual resignation to a life that feels like a compromise.

After the brief success of *Quicksand* and her second novel, *Passing* (1929), Larsen faded from the public eye, spending her later years working as a nurse rather than continuing her literary career. Yet her voice was never truly silenced. *Quicksand* endures as a powerful meditation on identity, longing, and the inescapable pull of societal forces.

Like Helga Crane, Larsen may have spent her life searching for a place to belong, but through her writing, she carved out a space where her voice could not be erased. *Quicksand* remains as proof that even those caught between worlds leave behind stories that refuse to sink.

Further reading:

Larsen, Nella. *Quicksand*, edited by Thadious M. Davis, Penguin, 1987.

Hutchinson, George. *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line*, Harvard University Press, 2006.

Andrés Albertsen -- Grundtvigian from Argentina?

By Reagan Gage

Andrés Albertsen lives in Minnesota where he serves two churches, leads worship in three languages (in English, Spanish, or Danish as needed), and enjoys being part of both the Danish American and Latino communities.

Albertsen grew up in Argentina, in the Danish Argentinian community. As an adult, he became the pastor of a Danish Lutheran church in Buenos Aires. Although services were primarily conducted in Spanish, congregants would also sometimes worship in Danish. Additionally, they served as a sort of Danish cultural center, receiving visitors from Denmark, maintaining a relationship with the embassy, teaching Danish, and even opening a Kierkegaard library.

After many years of serving as a pastor in the Danish Lutheran church, Albertsen came to the U.S. in 2011 to work on his Ph.D. at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. Right away he decided he wanted to connect with the Danish American community.

The first year, he missed the August Folk meeting in Tyler, Minnesota, because he was studying for an entrance exam for his Ph.D. But a few months later, he connected with the organizers of the event and made plans to attend, offering to speak at the event about the Danish Argentinian community.

They invited him to attend the 2012 folk meeting and to give a presentation. He found the meetings very similar to the ones he was accustomed to among Danish Argentinians.

Albertsen says, "Tyler became, and in many ways still is, the place in America where I feel most at home, because those Danish Americans remind me so much of my people, the Danish Argentinians."

Albertsen explained that even though the two groups developed separately, there are many similarities between the Danish American and Danish Argentinian communities, and that both have retained some aspects of traditional Danish culture that differ from modern Denmark.

Albertsen currently serves two churches in Willmar Minnesota: Vinje Lutheran church, a Lutheran church with Norwegian roots, and Iglesia Lutheran Paz y Esperanza, a Latino Lutheran church. Because of this, he has become one of the Latino leaders in the community.

He described this identity as something new that he adopted either upon entering the U.S. or when he began serving Iglesia Lutherana Paz y Esperanza. He explains, “This is something that is special to me – I never claimed that Latino identity in Argentina. In Argentina I was the Danish pastor.”

Albertsen still leads worship in Danish twice a year, something he enjoys because it helps him hold on to his Danish identity.

He said: “I like that I have these three hats: as an American, as a Latino, and as a Dane.” The way he lives out these three identities simultaneously is what makes his story so special.

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Dateline Denmark, by Edward Broadbridge



The Danish Monarchy

The above shot was recently voted ‘Press Photo of the Year, 2024’ by The Danish Union of Press Photographers. It depicts the physical moment when, after 52 years as reigning monarch, Queen Margrethe II, aged 83, abdicated the Danish Crown to her son, Frederik X. The photo was taken on 14 January 2024 by Mads Nissen of the daily newspaper Politiken at a Council of State at Christiansborg Palace, after which the Prime

Minister, Mette Frederiksen, proclaimed King Frederik X the new sovereign on the palace balcony in front of thousands of people.

In selecting it from a total of 2,723 pictures and 54 TV and Video productions, the jury commented: “We experience both a private moment in a family and simultaneously a moment of great ritual significance.” The outgoing queen spoke the words “God save the King” (Gud bevare Kongen) before she literally turned her back on the new monarch and walked out the door. In 1972, only 45 percent of Danes were in favour of the monarchy, believing it had no place in a modern democracy; by 2024 this number had risen to 85 percent (Epinion survey, including 14 percent “Don’t Knows”). Margrethe managed to stay away from scandal and to modernise the institution – allowing her two sons to marry commoners. Her royal motto was “God save Denmark”; Frederik’s is “United, committed, for the Kingdom of Denmark” (Forbundne, forpligtet, for Kongeriget Danmark).

This is the first time in nearly 900 years that a Danish sovereign has stepped down voluntarily. Margrethe retains the title of ‘Queen’. There is no coronation of a new monarch in Denmark, the last one being of the absolute monarch Christian VIII in 1840, after which the Danish Crown Prince Frederik married democratic Mary Donaldson (b. 1972 in Tasmania), whom he met at the Olympic Games in Sydney in 2000. Their firstborn, Crown Prince Christian, will be the next to succeed in a line that stretches all the way back to Gorm the Old (born c.900) and Harald Bluetooth (born c. 940). After Japan, Denmark is the oldest monarchy in the world.

Frederik and Mary remain hugely popular, as do their four children: Prince Christian (b. 2005), Princess Isabella (b. 2007), and the twins Prince Vincent and Princess Josephine (b. 2011). Speaking to the Spanish daily, El Pais, in January this year, Lars Hovbakke Sørensen, a historian and expert on the Danish monarchy, noted that while Queen Margrethe and King Frederik “are equally popular,” their styles differ significantly. “Margrethe, with her artistic and intellectual side, was a more formal figure. Frederik, by contrast, is more informal, which resonates with younger generations.”

Both Frederik and Mary are known for their support for various causes, with Frederik emphasizing environmental conservation and Mary advocating for women and LGBT rights. She is also admired for her fashion style. The prestigious fashion magazine Tatler recently wrote: “Known for her chic sartorial edge, the Danish queen is often compared to the Princess of Wales ... They both know how to pull off perfection in ultra-chic tailoring, graceful gowns and delectable dresses, while celebrating local designers in their respective kingdoms.”

The down-to-earth king is perhaps best known for the ‘Royal Run’. Supposed to be a one-off celebration for his 50th birthday it has since become an annual event. This year it will take place on 9 June with 97,500 participants (sold out) at 5 different locations: Ribe, Horsens, Viborg, Korsør, and Copenhagen with optional distances of 1 mile, 5 km or 10 km.

The King will be busy, as he is scheduled to run in Ribe, Horsens and Copenhagen, while his wife will run in Korsør and his son Christian in Viborg!

Danebod Folk Meeting News

Anita Young
612-860-8070

One of the foundational tenets of the Danish folk school tradition and the annual Danebod Folk Meeting is that teachers and students learn from each other. At the 2025 Folk Meeting, planned for August 20-24, professionals and participants will come together for three and a half days of mutual learning. Attendees will hear from experts on topics like finding confidence in today's news, the health of America's electrical grid, "de-stressing" in today's environment, examining our federal judiciary, and learning what it means to "live Danishly" like the "happiest people in the world." You will have the opportunity to let your voice, questions, and perspectives be heard! All events, from lectures to leisure, are designed for maximum interaction and engagement.

Reflecting on Grundtvig's goals for life-long learning, we will again offer an afternoon of experiential activity for small groups. Attendees will be able to choose to:

Join a group to make Danish open-faced sandwiches for Friday night dinner. Renee Showalter, Sonja Walker, and Carla Mortensen will facilitate. Visit Camden State Park for a guided outdoor walk in this Southwest Minnesota Gem. Carpool will be available. Explore your inner artist in an acrylic painting class. Pixie Jensen will provide all materials. Bring a shirt or apron to protect your clothes. Join long time dance instructor Terry Pedersen and pianist Anita Young in experiencing the joy of folk dancing for the body and soul. Polish your skills at lawn games, including Bocce, Croquet and Kub, led by Kitsi Vadheim. Create new song lyrics to favorite melodies in a songwriting activity taught by Henrik Strandskov.

Join us on the Danebod campus in Tyler for three days of lively discussions and hands-on learning! Learn more at danebodfolkmeeting.org.

Theodore Johannes Thuesen, Jr. (March 7, 1928 - July 11, 2024)

The Rev. Professor Theodore (Ted) Johannes Thuesen died on July 11, 2024, in Hickory, N.C., at age 96.

Ted was born March 7, 1928, in Cedar Falls, Iowa, to Theodore J. Thuesen and Christine Jensen Thuesen. He grew up on his parents' farm between Cedar Falls and Dike, Iowa. He attended Grand View University (then a junior college) and Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, graduating in 1949. He served briefly as a public school teacher before

being drafted into the U.S. Army during the Korean War. After his stint in the army (1951-53), he earned an M.Div. from Grand View Seminary (later absorbed by the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago). He also earned an M.A. in Sociology at the University of Iowa and completed additional graduate work at the University of Oregon, the University of Washington, and Appalachian State University.

Ted was ordained in 1956 by the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (formerly the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). He served two parishes, first at Bethesda Lutheran Church in Newark, N.J. (1956-59) and later at Hope Lutheran Church in Enumclaw, Washington (1959-63). After leaving parish ministry, he served on the Sociology Faculty of Pacific Lutheran University (1963-67). In 1967, he joined the faculty of Lenoir-Rhyne College (now University), from which he retired in 1994 at the rank of Professor. In 1981, he received Lenoir-Rhyne's Raymond M. Bost Distinguished Professor Award. Ted always said the move to Hickory was his best decision ever because there he met his wife, Mary Caroline Wise, a native of Columbia, S.C. Mary and Ted both came to Lenoir-Rhyne to work in September 1967, she as a librarian and he as a Sociology professor. They were married the following year. Together, they raised two children, both of whom became college professors.

Ted was proud of his Danish heritage (all four of his grandparents were immigrants from Denmark) and twice visited relatives in Denmark. He also enjoyed the academic life and his many colleagues and students at Lenoir-Rhyne. At both work and home, he was a reliable source of kindness, comfort, wisdom, and good humor.

Ted was preceded in death by an infant son, Erik Daniel Thuesen; a son-in-law, Scott Clarke; and his two siblings, Neal Thuesen and Carol DeYoung. He is survived by Mary, his wife of 56 years; a son, Peter Thuesen (of Indianapolis), and his wife, Jane Kenyon, and their children, Isaac, Joanna, and Margaret; a daughter, Sarah Thuesen (of Carrboro, N.C.), and her children, Henry and Ida; sister-in-law Jeanne Thuesen (of Cedar Falls, Iowa) and brother-in-law Gordon DeYoung (of Hopkins, Minn.); and numerous nieces and nephews.

A funeral for Ted was held at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Hickory, N.C., on August 17, 2024. Memorials may be made to St. Andrew's or to Lenoir-Rhyne University.

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Richard N. Juhl (September 27, 1932 – February 10, 2025)

Richard Norgaard "Dick" Juhl, a devoted husband, father, grandfather, and community leader, passed away peacefully on February 10, 2025, at the age of 92.

Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on September 27, 1932, Dick graduated from Washburn High School in 1951. He earned an associate degree from Grand View College in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1953, and he completed his bachelor's degree at the University of

Minnesota in 1958.

A Korean War veteran, Dick served in the U.S. Army from 1953 to 1955, spending 18 months as part of the Army of Occupation in Germany with the Quartermaster and Adjutant General Corps.

In 1955, he married Rita A. Pedersen, and together they built a loving family, raising four children. Their family grew to include their children's spouses, nine grandchildren along with their partners, and, most recently, their first great-grandchild.

Dick had a distinguished career in the food industry, serving as President of Olfisco Inc. from 1968 to 1977, then as vice president and later president of Lyon Food Products from 1977 to 1989. He went on to become CEO of Lyon Foods West, a role he held until 1991, before concluding his professional career as President of R.N. Juhl Associates, Ltd.

His leadership extended beyond the corporate world. Dick served on the boards of the National Food Processors Association, the Norwegian American Chamber of Commerce, and the Danish Immigrant Museum. A dedicated member of St. Peder's Lutheran Church, he served as president and chaired several committees including the 100th anniversary committee. Lastly, he served for four years on the board of the Becketwood Retirement Cooperative in Minneapolis.

Dick gave back to his community by volunteering for services like Meals on Wheels, the Food Shelf, and the Sheridan Program for School Meals. His life was marked by service, leadership, and deep connections with family and friends. He will be remembered for his kindness, humor, and wisdom.

Dick was preceded in death by his parents, Olaf and Maren Juhl, and his brothers, Allan Juhl (Ellen) and Tom Juhl (Nan). He is survived by his beloved wife of more than 69 years, Rita Juhl; his children, Peter Juhl (Sheryl), Anne Legeros (Nick), Erik Juhl (Andrea), and Lisa Brogan (Pat); and his grandchildren, Anna (Dan), Mary (Christopher, and daughter Sonja), David, Alex (Tom), Maren (Nick), Eva, Caroline, Kat, and John. He was the last of 26 cousins and leaves behind many cherished nieces, nephews, extended family members, friends at Becketwood, and others who will miss him.

A service to honor his life was held at St. Peder's Lutheran Church in Minneapolis on April 12. The family encourages donations to St. Peder's Lutheran Church in Minneapolis or to any food bank.

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The editorial staff of *Church and Life*

Meet Avery Means

I'm currently an undergraduate student majoring in Biblical Studies and Religion, with a minor in Writing. My academic focus is on the Old Testament, and I hope to continue exploring this rich, complex text in graduate school. Writing has always been my way of making sense of the world—a place where curiosity meets reflection and ideas come to life. I'm fascinated by the interplay between faith, culture, and history, which is why I'm so excited to be a part of Church and Life. This is an incredible opportunity to pursue my interests further and learn more about the culture surrounding this unique community.

Meet Reagan Gage

I am an English major at Samford University, where I enjoy learning about the way Christianity and political issues are portrayed through literature. I love working with Church and Life, and in particular meeting new people and hearing their stories. I look forward to learning more about what American-Danish culture and community look like, the values and traditions that make it special, and the joys and challenges that come with preserving Danish culture whilst living in America.

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Postscript - by Brad Busbee

In 2023, then US Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy published *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation*. In the introduction, Dr. Murthy writes:

"When I first took office as Surgeon General in 2014, I didn't view loneliness as a public health concern. But that was before I embarked on a cross-country listening tour, where I heard stories from my fellow Americans that surprised me. People began to tell me they felt isolated, invisible, and insignificant. Even when they couldn't put their finger on the word 'lonely,' time and time again, people of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds, from every corner of the country, would tell me, 'I have to shoulder all of life's burdens by myself,' or 'if I disappear tomorrow, no one will even notice.'"

Even though Murthy presents a bleak picture of American life, the book is a fascinating and thought provoking read. (You can find a link to the publication [here](#).) It offers a glossary of 19 terms related to loneliness and social isolation. For example, "Belonging" is defined as "a fundamental human need—the feeling of deep connection with social groups, physical places, and individual and collective experiences," while "loneliness" is "a subjective distressing experience that results from perceived isolation or inadequate meaningful connections." The book discusses trends that are eroding social connections, outlines some of the known causes of loneliness and isolation, names the groups at the highest

risk, and details effects on health and well-being. The chapters likely of most interest to the readers of *Church and Life* are “How Social Connection Impacts Communities” (Chapter 3) and “A National Strategy to Advance Social Connection” (Chapter 4), which Murthy frames as a “call to build a movement to mend the social fabric of our nation.”

The unstated assumption is that our “social fabric” is torn and that isolation is a main cause. I would say Murthy is correct. And I think he would be stating the obvious if he were to touch on political division and its role in social isolation, particularly how division stokes imagined grievances that inspire people to avoid one another. And what could the new Surgeon General, Denise Hinton, who was appointed in January of 2025, have to say about political division? Not much more that would be productive . . . without a proposal for ways to bolster “social connectedness” (another term in Murthy’s glossary).

I bring these concepts of belonging and loneliness before the readers of *Church and Life* this Easter season because it seems to me to be of special interest to them as people who celebrate community and the connections between the church and the people. Yes, “belonging” and “loneliness” are emotional states. They are also matters of physical community, a point that Murthy makes repeatedly. It is also a point repeatedly suggested in this issue. Consider Grundtvig’s hymn that opened this issue as an example. When he translated it in 1815, he was intentionally forging a connection with people across time, even people who would have sung the words in a different language over six hundred years earlier. The hymn was a social connector of a very sophisticated kind, meant to demonstrate the continuity of the faith and the people testifying to it. Consider Lars Ottosen’s Maundy Thursday homily and his point about physical togetherness manifested through the Eucharist. Ottosen reminds us of the physical side of the sacrament in order to address social connectedness. He points out that, “at a table, you are shaped not only by what you say and hear—but by the food you pass, the space you make, the dignity you offer others.” From Maundy Thursday through Easter Sunday, Christians all over the world will be connected through their faith and through the physical acts of worship. Consider the connectedness of people from around the world, as evidenced by the extraordinary lives of Ted Thuesen and Dick Juhl and by the stories of Nella Larsen’s search for identity and Andrés Albertsen’s spiritual journey. Even the image (at the opening of the issue) of the sanctuary in The Danish Lutheran Church in Yorba Linda, California-- thank you to Pastor Anne-Grethe Krogh Nielsen for sharing it--with its lovely blue stained glass, side-by-side Danish and American flags, and Bertel Thorvaldsen’s Jesus (a sculpture familiar to many of our readers) -- it too is a complex of meaningful connections, threads that binds us into community. We are not alone, and I imagine that Grundtvig would be happy to know to so many people gather at Danebod each August. He would be happy to see that Danes and Americans of Danish descent continue to sing and learn together.

And so, Happy Easter! We invite you to send us your stories so we can share them in *Church and Life*! Heeding Murthy’s call to action, we want to continue the movement and-- in our own unique way -- strengthen the social fabric of our nation.

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Recent Gifts and Memorials to *Church and Life*

Memorial gifts:

In memory of Egon Bodtker, \$100 from Diana Bodtker.

In memory of Dick Juhl, \$50 from Janet Jensen

In memory of Paul Laursen \$100 from Carol Laursen

Contributing (Up to \$20)

Karen Moore

Lillian Jensen

Charles Lauritsen

Julia Steinmetz

Anita Young

Richard and Rita Juhl

Supporting (\$21 to \$50)

Bert Bodaski

Marilyn and Bill Gift

David and Karen Johnson

Marilyn McGriff

Mick and Lois Nedegaard

Bodil Wilson

Sustaining (\$51 to \$1000)

Maia Twedt and Eric Berger

Thomas Chittick

Sonja Knudsen

Jill Mortensen

Thank you for your support!

And remember to send your memories and traditions of midsummer festivals and events to this email address: Churchandlife1952@gmail.com