

June 9, 2010

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Greetings friends in Christ,

Summer Opportunities for Growth

In the George Gershwin musical, *Porgy and Bess*, one of the most familiar songs states, ***“Summertime, And the livin' is easy, Fish are jumpin', And the cotton is high...”*** Summer in the South—it's hot and humid, and bustling with energy. Don't you love the summer? As a kid, the summer offered a great change in venue. It was a time when the schedule changed, when the sun stayed out later, and so did we.

In fact, when I was a child, one of the best parts of summer was a little tent that we set up in our backyard. We had a campfire, and we would have stayed out in the tent every night if our parents would let us. We ate out on the back porch more often with the barbeque fired up. There are special fruits and vegetables that seem reserved only for the summer months. I know you can probably get them at other times, but there's nothing like fresh blueberries in the summer, or watermelon, or even plums or peaches, not to mention home-grown tomatoes!.

When my kids were small I always tried to make extra free time in the summer months. I would go in to work early so I could skip out and spend time with them in the late afternoon. Whether it was playing soccer or baseball on the front lawn, or hide-and-seek in the back, throwing a Frisbee or batting a badminton birdie, it was a time to be outside. Sometimes it was a trip to the Dairy Queen, and sometimes we made homemade popsicles with Kool-aid. There were days we went to the park, or to the zoo, or we traveled to see family. Life was filled with endless possibilities. Summer also was a time of growth. I would watch my boys grow in simple skills; learning to swim, riding a bike, hitting a baseball, or kicking a soccer ball. There was a day when I actually could beat my children in a race—alas, those days are long gone...

Summer is a wonderful time of growth. You can see the things nature produces all around us. I've often dabbled with growing a vegetable garden. As a youth I was involved in 4-H, and we



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always planted a garden. Throughout the summer we would watch it grow, as we enjoyed the wonderful things it brought forth. But it wasn't all fun and games. There was a lot of work involved, too. We had to prepare the area, work the soil, plant the seeds, water, and weed! For me, weeding was the worst part. It took time and patience, things which have always seemed to escape me. Yet the end result was a beautiful garden. We raised everything from tomatoes and green beans to corn and carrots. We even had strawberries and rhubarb, which I never learned to like. My mom would have us gather it, and what wasn't consumed immediately was canned for the future. There was little waste, and we ate in a pretty healthy fashion—even back then!

We also learned a lot in the summer months. It was a different kind of learning than what we got in school, but none-the-less, important. We learned valuable lessons about responsibility and taking care of things; we learned about working together, side by side, beginning to understand how teams can accomplish more. We learned about how to use tools and how to how to conserve water. We even learned about competition, because we entered some vegetables in the county fair. Summer was a great time of learning. It still is, not only mentally, but also spiritually!

The Bible says, ***“And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.”*** Isaiah 58:11 A few years ago the State of Georgia was going through a terrible drought. You didn't dare water your lawn, much less attempt to put in a garden. I still remember the joy when it finally rained and we saw the lake levels come up. During these months of summer, God wants to water our lives too with His Word and Sacraments. As we ground our lives in these things they will never fail us! That's because God wants us to grow in Him! But it doesn't just automatically happen. We have to be available to Him.

All across Florida and Georgia there are a number of ways you can strengthen and grow your faith this summer. In the parish the summer seemed like a time when things slowed down. What a great opportunity to start a summer Bible study group by gathering some friends for a weekly barbeque and time sharing the Word of God. For some, the summer months seem like an opportunity to skip Sunday morning worship. But why not use it as an occasion to begin a new ministry instead? It's a great time for pastors to do teaching series and a wonderful time to build bridges into the community in which your church is set.

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In a day when so many Vacation Bible School programs are going to an evening session because of convenience or scheduling, I was always determined to keep VBS in that morning slot. Folks would say, "Aren't we just babysitting for the community?" Absolutely we were, and it was wonderful. Whether or not we would ever see them again, we got to tell those kids about Jesus, and more than once I had non-member parents come to me at the closing and say how much their children enjoyed VBS. Here's a great opportunity for growth, not just for the children, but for everyone involved.

Here's the point, if you were wondering: Summer is a great time for growth. There are opportunities all around you. In the Atlanta area, we have Pastor Wiggins, our Urban Mission Strategist, who is running a summer tutoring program. He's looking for volunteers to help reach the children in the community he's serving. In fact, if you're in the Atlanta area and looking for a service opportunity, why not contact him at Pastor.Wiggins@AliveAtChrist.org or (404) 767-2892.

There are servant event opportunities, in our District near Immokalee. In fact, I feel certain that if you contact Pastor Bob Selle, BobSelle@aol.com, he can help you find things to do that will serve Jesus and help people in need. There is also a link in the column to the right with information about our [District Servant Event](#). There are opportunities for growth in service all around us. You can contact Sam Sipes with Lutheran Services Florida, www.lsfnet.org, or Gary Danielsen with Lutheran Services of Georgia, www.lsga.org, and they no can no doubt point you to some awesome opportunities to serve our Lord in ministry this summer. You don't have to look too far. There are countless opportunities right in your own back yard!

The Psalmist wrote: ***"As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God."*** Psalm 42:1 May the heat and dryness of summer cause us to thirst after a deeper relationship with Jesus, and may that result in our service to those around us in His name!

Blessings on a wonderful summer,

Greg

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