

# What's In a Name?

By

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*I am in search of what might be a compelling reason for one's getting up in the morning and pursuing ministry through the entity we know as **St. Timothy Evangelical Lutheran Church of Grand Island, New York**. For the decades to come, I am in search of that which might become the basis for a renewed, sustained and passionate commitment to God's call to be His church, doing His work in the name of Christ for the sake of the world He loves.. I am in search of the soul of that thing situated on an island in the middle of the mighty Niagara River called **St. Timothy Evangelical Lutheran Church of Grand Island, New York**.*

**The end of the search just might be found in your name.** Come with me as we go searching there. Consider your name:

## **St. Timothy**

Timothy became a convert to Christianity in the year 48 A.D. as a young man. The message of Christ came to him through the ministry of the Apostle Paul who took him under his wing and mentored him. Timothy was referred to by Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians (4:17) as "my beloved and faithful child in the Lord (NRSV) or "my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord (NIV)."

After being ordained, he was sent as a pastoral leader to various churches Paul founded. Paul referred to him "as our brother and co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ (*I Thess. 3:2*)"

Images that stand out for me are: youthful...convert...son/daughter...co-worker.

Picture St. Timothy Church as young – youthful in outlook - vigorous - optimistic - full of life - sensing a future as far as the eye can see.

Then picture a church that is young in spirit, born of having been given a brand new start in life. That new life born of conversion...of renewal...of starting afresh through repentance and turning to Christ...being "born from above" again as in our baptism.

Picture next being "beloved sons and daughters." Picture being loved by Jesus so profoundly that serving him is no burden, but a joy. Think of being so secure in his love for you that every day you want to please him and be with him every minute of the day.

Finally, picture being “co-workers.” Picture being a congregation of co-workers proclaiming, preaching, and spreading the gospel of Christ.

## **Evangelical**

The word “evangelical” comes from the Greek word *euongelion* (pronounced: ooh-on-gel-e-on) In English, *euongelion* is translated “gospel” or “good news.”

Jesus began his ministry preaching “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the *euongelion*. (Mark 1:15).” The *euongelion* of the New Testament is the gospel/good news regarding the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul would write of this gospel: “I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith...for in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written ‘The one who is righteous through faith will live.’ (Romans 1:16-17)”

Paul summarized the gospel centered in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ this way: “Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. (Romans 3:23-25)”

To use the term “evangelical” in one’s name (as in St. Timothy Evangelical Lutheran Church) is to claim the *euongelion* - “the good news regarding the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ” - as being central to one’s identity.

Imagine: St. Timothy church being evangelical.

Would it be important to you that St. Timothy church be “evangelical”? Would being associated with a congregation that has the *euongelion* central to its being add weight to its importance? Might being “evangelical” be a source of inspiration?

Consider another application. Would it add something fresh and important to every consideration of something major we should do as congregation if that consideration was tested against its faithfulness to the mission of proclaiming the *euongeleon*?

## **Lutheran**

“Lutheran” is a proud name. It embodies a whole host of ideas, images and actions that have been and are important to world-wide Christendom.

When people speak of being “Lutheran,” their comments generally fall into three categories: cultural, practical and theological.

Cultural Lutheranism harkens back to place of descent (we have been largely an immigrant church up to more recent times), language and customs.

Practical matters take into account the richness of our liturgy and strong music programs. The practice of baptizing infants and confirming adolescents is the norm. Sunday School and the teaching of the catechism have played an important role in the nurture of children. A “congregational polity” (consistent with the importance of notions of democracy) is standard for organizational structures. Lutherans have a great history of providing emergency aid all around the world. Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran Immigration Services have stellar reputations. Lutheran social service agencies and Lutheran schools are among the best in the country. Advocacy for social justice is a strong thread. The belief that the church is served well by having a highly educated, “professional” clergy has spawned strong institutions for theological training.

To this day, the greatest contribution to Christianity is, in my opinion, Lutheran theology. It is said that all “Lutheran theology” can be grouped under four themes: (1) law and gospel, (2) justification by grace through faith, (3) theology of the cross, and (4) the two kingdoms. Each takes us deep into Holy Scripture, the concept of “the living word” and into living out God’s call to be His people.

Which theme resonates with you? Which accent touches your heart? What practice inspires you to what Jesus called “greater works”? What significance does it have that you might be called “Lutheran”?

## **Church**

The Greek word for “church” is *ecclesia*. (Pronounced: *ek-lay-see-ya*) The origin of the concept is the Old Testament idea of “the people of God” whom God has called out for His purposes. The *ecclesia* of the New Testament is the people summoned out by God. They are “brothers,” “believers,” “disciples,” those who “call on the name of Jesus.” They are “the people of God confessing as Lord and Christ that Jesus whom the Jews/Romans had crucified and whom God raised up. (VonAllmen)”

The Apostle Paul says the *ecclesia* is the people whom God is calling together in Jesus Christ. They form a body whose head is Christ and whose members are the faithful. The church is the organ by which Christ is present and active in the world during the interval between his resurrection and his coming again.

The church is God’s. Expressions like “my church” or “our church” are foreign to the New Testament.

What images resonate with you? What ideas clarify or give direction? What about: “people summoned out by God,” “people called out for his purposes,” “the people confessing Jesus as

Lord and Christ,” “a body whose head is Christ and whose members are the faithful,” “the organ by which Christ is present and active in the world”?

### **Grand Island, New York**

Location and setting significantly impact the life of any living organism. This is true for ecosystems, animals and humans. This is certainly true of the church. Although it is a part of a global network, a church community is impacted most directly by its place of origin.

St. Timothy Evangelical Lutheran Church of Grand Island, New York is situated on an island in the middle of the Niagara River. This island is approximately eight miles long and six miles wide. It is essentially flat and enjoys spectacular views of Canada as well as the New York State mainland. A pair of aesthetically pleasing twin bridges links the island with the mainland and represents the only functional entry and egress from the island.

The population as of 2010 is 20,374. This represents a 9.41% increase since the year 2000. There is just about an equal number of males as to females. The median age in 2008 was 39.1. The ethnic make-up is overwhelmingly Caucasian. Minorities, it is estimated, make up less than 10 % of the population. The Grand Island school district consists of one high school, one middle school and three elementary school buildings. There are twelve Christian churches on the island. There are two state parks, several boat clubs and country clubs, multiple garden clubs and a strong youth sporting program. Commerce is limited after the decline of the chemical industry several years ago. There is one large grocery store, four banks, a theme park and numerous small businesses.

People move here by choice, being attracted to “island living” and other factors such as affordable housing, good school system and a sense of safety.

St. Timothy church was founded in the 1950’s during a period when there was a steady migration to the area from the Midwest and elsewhere to serve the burgeoning chemical industry. At one point, there was the expectation the population of Grand Island would more than double. This was never to be, partially by community choice.

The question to ask is: “How is being ‘of Grand Island, New York’ a positive for St. Timothy church going forward? What particular opportunities does it present?”

### **CONCLUSION**

**St. Timothy Evangelical Lutheran Church** are the words of our name. I have suggested some clues into what they might represent to you, the congregation of St. Timothy. Think on these things. Might they be helpful to you in developing a vision of what you might want to become in the decades to come?