

Advent Lutheran Church  
Forecast: Sustained Winds  
June 8, 2025  
Acts 2:1-21, 41

Like many of you, I grew up in the church. More specifically, I grew up in one congregation – the First Presbyterian Church in Arlington, Texas. I quickly learned my way around the church – from playground to pew. After attending worship for years, participating in Sunday school, and being confirmed, I was sure I knew what it meant to be Christian.

I could tell you exactly what happened during the 60 minutes I spent in the sanctuary each week. Church and the Christianity it represented made complete sense to me, until I found myself attending church somewhere else.

Like many adolescents, my religious experiences expanded for hormonal rather than theological reasons.

I will never forget my first experience attending a church service with my then girlfriend and her family.

In a matter of minutes, my perception of church changed forever. While the building looked similar from the outside and contained pews on the inside, nothing else was familiar. The order of worship didn't feel orderly at all. I was intrigued when people around me sang unknown songs with unexpected passion.

The sermon was interesting, but it kept going and going and going. Then, instead of a benediction, I heard a second sermon, which actually was an invitation for those present to trust Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. After more singing followed by clapping for the people who prayed the prayer and got "saved" it ended. What a strange way to do church!

I learned an incredibly important lesson: **The wind of God's Spirit blows in mysterious life-giving ways.** Clearly, the church was much bigger than I had ever imagined.

This lesson is one I find myself needing to relearn – or at least be reminded of – on a regular basis. Today, as we consider the Pentecost story and think of the birth of this movement that started as the Way of Jesus and is now often called Christianity, I invite you to join with me in an exploration of some of the ways the Life-Giving Wind is blowing all around us.

Wherever the Life-Giving Wind blows, the church is about unity not uniformity.

Journey with me into the Pentecost story from the second chapter of Acts.

Step back and ask yourself, “If I had all the power in the world and wanted to enable a huge crowd of people from different parts of the world to speak to one another, wouldn’t I just give them a common language?”

While such an idea makes sense to me pragmatically, it frightens me theologically. A shared language from day one would mean our faith is about uniformity. It would mean we are all to be alike – something like mass produced Christians.

Instead of uniformity, our shared story begins with unity. People came together and their lives changed forever, yet they didn’t lose their language or cultural distinctions. Miraculously each person gained something instead – the ability to hear everyone else speaking in their own language.

While unity not uniformity is the story of the Way of Jesus generally, it is especially the story of the denomination that ordained me: the United Church of Christ. The UCC is a denomination that was created when four denominations came together to form a new united and uniting denomination.

Interestingly enough on Pentecost I am here as your Interim Pastor. I am able to do serve in this role because the ELCA and UCC are in full communion.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ELCA Full Communion Partners, available at [www.elca.org/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Full-Communion](http://www.elca.org/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Full-Communion)

This is just one small example of a larger trend in church life toward increased collaboration.

The Life-Giving Wind is bringing together churches from denominations and traditions that are theologically aligned and those that historically wanted nothing to do with one another. I see this most clearly in my work at White Rock Center of Hope. At Hope, it is normal to see people from churches all across the theological continuum coming together to feed, clothe, and empower their community.

When united, people of faith produce a much deeper impact. This Life-Giving Wind is blowing freely and remaking the church on a regular basis.

The Life-Giving Wind is always blowing – sometimes as a breeze and sometimes at gale force. Wherever the Life-Giving Wind blows, the church is about renewal not repetition.

Churches that do the same thing over and over again often see diminishing results and more disturbingly find that they are led by programs or tradition rather than by the Life-Giving Wind.

Several months ago, Advent's staff and council learned about something called the congregational life cycle. Notably, while the congregational life cycle often follows the human life cycle, it doesn't have to.

People progress through life stages from childhood to adolescence to young adulthood then on to middle age and retirement before reaching old age and finally death.

When congregations are attentive to the Spirit and intentional about renewal, they can do better than halting the aging process; they can actually return to earlier life stages. Can you imagine Advent becoming a teenager again?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For more on this check out George Bullard's work that builds on and contextualizes Isaac Adizes' organizational lifecycle model for the church.

As I listen for the voices of those who are carried by the Life-Giving Wind I am encouraged by those who have eyes to see renewal happening all around us.

Diana Butler Bass is an independent scholar of American religion and culture, suggests that we are now in the early stages of the Fourth Great Awakening. This new Great Awakening is “marked by its insistence on connection, networks, relationships, imagination, and story . . .”<sup>9</sup> It will include the church, but will not be limited to the church.

Big trends of church renewal are nice, but connecting to stories of individual congregations is often more inspirational.

A few years ago, I had the privilege of participating in a social enterprise fellowship. We traveled to various places across the country to see how churches and people of faith were making transformational impacts in their communities – doing good while also generating significant revenue.

The most memorable of these visits was in the impoverished Russell community of Louisville, Kentucky. There, the historic St. Peter’s United Church of Christ had experienced years of dwindling membership and deferred maintenance yet felt called to make an outsized impact for good.

Today, the result of their efforts is Molo Village.<sup>3</sup> In one of the poorest zip codes in the United States they constructed and leased what is now a fully occupied 30,000 square foot facility that was constructed on the church’s former parking lot. It has become an engine for economic empowerment and wealth generation.

Church renewal can also take on more traditional forms. About a decade ago I served as the Interim Senior Pastor of a congregation that had much promise yet was bogged down by an unhealthy focus on their differences. Since my departure the congregation has doubled in size. Today, they give away

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.molovillagecdc.org/>

hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to a variety of local charities in their community. And they fund that generous outreach through their congregation's social enterprise – a church run thrift store.

The Life-Giving Wind is blowing. The spiritual forecast calls for sustained winds. Please plan accordingly.

I have been speaking about the church and trying to do so in a Spirit-led manner.

I'm reminded that the church did not start as institution or a highly structured organization; it was a movement and became a permanent revolution. And it is powered by people – God's people, people that include you and me.

Finally, I'm intrigued by the Pentecostals. You get that Pentecost is right there in the name of their tradition. Also, while this movement started only a little more than 100 years ago, it has earned the distinction as "the fastest-growing religion in the history of the world."<sup>4</sup> And, in more recent years here in America, it has been the only tradition to experience numeric growth.

Exploring the ins and outs of Pentecostalism is beyond the scope of this sermon, but I think it is important to share that they "expect to see God's miraculous power displayed on earth as a part of normal, everyday experience."<sup>5</sup>

In other words, for Pentecostals, everyday is Pentecost.

Perhaps this can be true for us as well. What might change if we not only felt but responded to the Life-Giving wind every day?

Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas Jacobsen, *The World's Christians: Who they are, Where they are, and How they got there:* (WileyBlackwell, 2011), 51.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 50.