

**FROM THE  
PASTOR'S DESK**

**The Christmas Tree—  
A Missouri Synod  
Contribution to  
Christmas in America!**

*This article by Pastor Kevin Vogts appeared in the December, 1998 issue of The Lutheran Witness.*

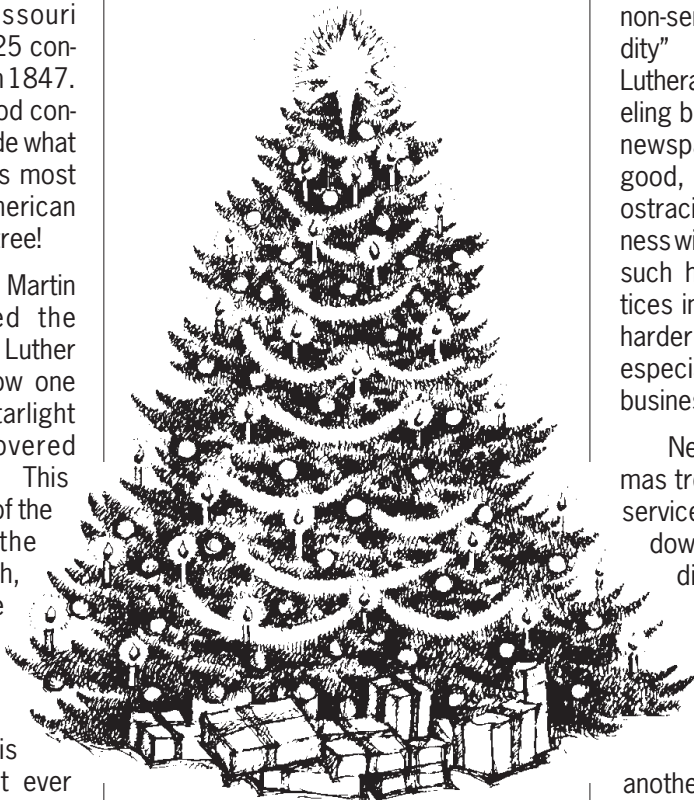
The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was organized—by just 25 congregations—at Chicago, Illinois in 1847. Four years later, a Missouri Synod congregation in Cleveland, Ohio made what is certainly the Missouri Synod's most significant contribution to American popular culture: the Christmas tree!

According to legend, it was Martin Luther himself who invented the Christmas tree. It is said that as Luther trudged home through the snow one night he noticed how the starlight sparkled through the ice-covered branches of the evergreens. This reminded him of how the "glory of the Lord shone round about" the shepherds the night of Jesus' birth, and inspired him to chop a tree down, drag it home, and set it up, bedecked with candles, nuts and fruits.

Whether or not that legend is true, it is a *fact* that the first ever Christmas tree in a church anywhere in North America was in a Missouri Synod congregation. At the Cleveland Public Auditorium at the corner of Lakeside Avenue and East Sixth Street in downtown Cleveland is a historical marker with an inscription attesting to this fact:

*"On this site stood the first Christmas tree in America publically lighted and displayed in a church Christmas ceremony. On this site stood the original Zion Lutheran Church where in 1851, on Christmas Eve, Pastor Henry Schwan lighted the first Christmas tree in Cleveland. The tradition he brought from Germany soon became widely accepted throughout America. The present site of Zion Lutheran Church is at 2062 East 30th Street."*

Pastor Schwan would later rise to great prominence in the Missouri Synod, serving as Synodical President from 1878 to 1899. He was also the original author of the questions, explanations



and Bible proof texts appended to Luther's Small Catechism, which you may have used in Confirmation class (the old blue Catechism), and are still used today in an updated version.

But in 1851, Pastor Schwan was a young minister of 32 serving a small

congregation of German immigrants. Little did he and his flock realize the furor they would cause!

Christmas Eve was on a Wednesday evening as Pastor Schwan stood before the candlelit tree and read the Christmas story to his congregation. For Pastor Schwan and his parishioners, their Christmas tree brought back wonderful memories of Christmas in the Old Country. It was bedecked with candles and topped with a silver star which Pastor Schwan himself had brought from Germany.

By Friday, their Christmas tree was the talk of the town—and the talk was not good! Local newspapers called it "a non-sensical, asinine, moronic absurdity" and editorialized against these Lutherans "worshipping a tree" and "groveling before a shrub." Worst of all, the newspapers recommended that the good, Christian citizens of Cleveland ostracize, shun, and refuse to do business with these Lutherans "who tolerated such heathenish and idolatrous practices in their church," making life even harder for the struggling immigrants, especially those with stores and other businesses.

Nevertheless, they left their Christmas tree up for the following Sunday's services. But after the tree was taken down, Pastor Schwan's wife, Emma, discovered the silver star he had brought from Germany in the trash. She cleaned it up and asked why he had thrown it away.

"Because there will never be another Christmas tree in Cleveland," he said.

"Nonsense," she answered. "This year you put up the first tree and next Christmas there will be many trees in Cleveland." Emma saved the star, and her prediction came true beyond her wildest imagination.

During the following year, Pastor Schwan carefully researched the issue and came to the conclusion that the use of Christmas trees was not a sacrilege but a good Christian custom in which Christians expressed their joy at the birth of the Christ Child. He wrote many letters and received replies assuring him that lighted and decorated Christmas trees were the custom in many Christian countries. Convinced that the Christmas tree was not of pagan origin, he actively promoted its use as a symbol of the joy of Christmas.

On Christmas Eve in 1852, his church again displayed a Christmas tree. But this time it was not the only one in Cleveland. In fact, decorated trees appeared in homes all over town, and within five years Christmas trees were being erected in homes and churches all across the country!

Although Pastor Schwan was not the very first person to decorate a Christmas tree in North America—one being noted in history at Fort Dearborn as early as 1804—he was the first to introduce one into a church. He spent the rest of his life promoting the use of Christmas trees and was almost singlehandedly responsible for this custom gaining widespread acceptance and popularity in the United States. Did you ever dream that the pastor who wrote the questions in the back of the Small Catechism was also the man who popularized the Christmas tree in America?

So, as you put up your Christmas tree this year, and admire the Christmas tree in our church, remember that the

widespread adoption of the custom of the Christmas tree is largely a Missouri Synod contribution to the celebration of Christmas in America!

Pastor Kevin Vogts



November 23 was a very special Sunday as we welcomed 23 new members into our congregation! Most joined by Affirmation of Faith, after taking information classes for the past several months with Pastor Vogts. There was a special recognition during the morning service with a well-attended potluck dinner following.

We welcome these new members of our Holy Cross family!

Preschool and is now in Kindergarten at Dakota Valley Elementary School. Ben is almost four years old and attends Holy Cross Preschool and Caitlyn is two years old. Emma was born on October 26, 2003. The Bargstadts are at home in McCook Lake at 562 Lakeshore Drive; 235-0700; bargstadt5@aol.com.

JASON, KATHI AND MADISYN BIETZ—Jason grew up in Tripp and Kathi in Feeman, South Dakota. Both attended the University of South Dakota and moved to this area three years ago. Jason is the Business Manager for the Dakota Vally School District and is currently pursuing an MBA from USD. Kathi is a Registered Medical Technologist and Laboratory Coordinator for the Siouxland Community Health Center. Jason's hobbies include golf and fantasy football, and Kathi enjoys boating and being Mom for Madisyn, who was born on September 1 and Baptized at Holy Cross on October 12, 2003. The Bietzes are at home in McCook Lake at 574 Lakeshore Drive; 232-6517; jbietz@dtgnet.com.



**The largest group of new members ever in the history of Holy Cross was welcomed on November 23.**

MIKE, DANIELL, ASHLEY, BEN, CAITLYN, AND EMMA BARGSTADT—Mike grew up in Hartington, Nebraska and Daniell in Bellevue, Nebraska. The have lived in this area about five years. Mike attended the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, the University of Iowa, and the Univeristy of South Dakota and is a Physical Therapist with Physical Therapy Specialists in Sioux City. Daniell also attended he University of Nebraska at Lincoln and is a full-time Mom. Mike's hobbies include sports and Daniell enjoys being with the kids. Ashley, who is five years old, attended Holy Cross

PAUL, DIANA, ALEX, AND MORGAN KAARDAL—The Kaardals recently moved from Redwood Falls, Minnesota, where Paul had operated a Subway shop and Diana was a Children's Librarian. Paul is the new American Family insurance agent for our area, with his office located in Dakota Dunes at the Village Square center. His office number is 242-4321. Paul is also the new co-owner of the *Two Rivers Times* newspaper, in which he has a regular column. Diana is the Circulation Director at the Morningside College library, and she

## Crossnotes

*Published Monthly by*

*Holy Cross Evangelical  
Lutheran Church*

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Dakota Dunes, SD 57049-1902*

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*December, 2003*

*Volume 1*

*Number 12*

recently received her Masters Degree in English Literature from Minnesota State University at Mankato. Paul is involved in many community organizations, including the Cub Scout and Jaycees, and his hobbies include collecting old 16mm movies. Diana's interests include reading. Alex is nine years old and is in Third Grade at Dakota Valley Elementary School and Morgan is eight years old and is in Second Grade at Dakota Valley. The Kaardals are at home in the Wellington Apartments adjacent to the church, 230 Courtyard Drive, Apt. 212; 422-1444; pkaardal@amfam.com.

**JIM AND LANA MILLER AND AUSTIN MUNNS**—Jim and Lana have been married three years. Jim attended South Dakota State University and is Team Lead for Business Sales at Gateway and Lana is in Customer Support at Gateway. Jim is also a Volunteer Fireman and EMT and President of the Dakota Valley Baseball Association, and his hobbies include golf and fishing. Lana enjoys being a Mom and homemaker and is involved in PTL. Austin is 12 years old and is in Seventh Grade at Dakota Valley Middle School. His brother Arrend Munns was previously confirmed at Holy Cross. They are at home in Dakota Dunes at 186 Levee Trail; 235-1650; jimgmiller15@aol.com.

**JIM, ROSE AND HEIDI ROSENBAUM**—Jim and Rose both grew up in Elk Point and moved to Dakota Dunes earlier this year. Jim attended the University of South Dakota and was a teacher until taking over his family business, Jim's Water Treatment. Rose attended Nettleton College and works with Jim in their business. Her hobbies include boating and reading. Jim is also the Girls Basketball Coach at Dakota Valley High School, and he enjoys hunting, fishing and boating. Their daughter Heidi is a Sophomore at Dakota Valley, where she plays basketball under her Dad. The whole family enjoys all kinds of sports. Another daughter, Amanda, is a Freshman at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, majoring in Spanish and Psychology. The Rosenbaums are at home in Dakota Dunes at 296 Bison Trail, 232-4209; roserosenbaum@hotmail.com, jim.rosenbaum@k12.sd.us.



You Are Invited to a Christmas Open House  
at the Home of Rev. Kevin and Terese Vogts  
369 Partridge Circle, Dakota Dunes

Sunday, December 7  
Open House Begins at 4:00pm  
Buffet Dinner Begins at 5:00pm  
Bring the Whole Family – Children Welcome

*All Invited – Everyone Welcome!*

**JOEY, MARCY, BRYCE AND BRADY SCHROEDER**—Joey and Marcy both grew up in Sioux City. Joey attended Palmer College of Chiropractic and is a Chiropractor with Heartland Chiropractic Associates, with offices in Sioux City and Dakota Dunes. Marcy attended Des Moines Community College and is an Orthodontic Assistant at the practice of Dr. Dan Kaler. Bryce is five years old and attends Holy Cross Preschool, and Brady is one year old. Joey enjoys hunting and fishing and Marcy enjoys horseback riding. The recently built a new home in Deer Run and are at home at 30 Deer Run Circle, McCook Lake; 422-4373; schroederj@cableone.net.



### ***Poinsettias Donations***

We have arranged for locally grown poinsettias through Mosher Garden Center for \$10.50 each. Sign up on the bulletin board indicating that you wish to have these plants purchased for you, and put your payment in the offering marked "Poinsettias." The deadline to sign up is Wednesday, December 10. The plants will be delivered to the church for display beginning on December 14

You are also welcome to bring your own plants, if you wish to purchase them elsewhere or receive them as gifts. Please sign up on the bulletin board indicating that you will provide your own plants and drop them by the church anytime before Christmas.

After Christmas you may take home the plants you have donated or brought. When you sign up, please indicate whom your plants are in memory or honor of, the way you want it printed in the January newsletter.

## **BIRTH**

*Emma Marie Bargstadt*

Daughter of Daniel and Mike Bargstadt  
Born October 26, 2003  
7 lbs. 4 oz.  
18½ inches

*"Children are a heritage from the  
LORD, a blessing from Him."  
Psalms 127:3*



## Successful Year for Holy Cross Preschool

The adage says “a picture is worth a thousand words,” and the great success and increased enrollment of our Holy Cross Preschool, and its impact on the community, can best be seen from these class pictures which show all the children whose lives are being touched by God’s love. In addition, over 20 older children participate in our After School Care program.

Two of the new member families listed on pages 2-3 have children in the preschool, so the success of our preschool is also contributing to the growth of our congregation.

Our Preschool enrollment has been so strong, and growing, that the Board of Education is investigating the possibility of adding yet another class next year, an all-day Tuesday-Thursday kindergarten readiness class. This addition would totally utilize our facilities to the maximum possible number of classes.

Thank you to our dedicated Board of Education, Janet Martin and Terese Vogts, our Preschool staff, Julie Krull, Sharon Godwin, Sandra Diaz, Diane Bald and Tiffany Schmitt, and Treasurer Dennis Melstad for their efforts to make our Preschool and After School Care programs such a great success!

## New Service During December

At the suggestion of the Board of Elders, we are rotating the worship order used in our services more frequently. In our Sunday worship throughout December we will be using “Divine Service II—Setting II” (page 178ff) from *Lutheran Worship*.

The words for this service will be very familiar, for they are identical to the more often used “Divine Service II—Setting I” (page 158ff). However, the musical setting is different.

These two services from *Lutheran Worship*, which are also found in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, are among



**Monday-  
Wednesday-  
Friday Mornings**  
Julie Krull and  
Sandra Diaz

**Monday-  
Wednesday-  
Friday  
Afternoons**  
Julie Krull and  
Sandra Diaz



**Tuesday-Thursday Mornings**  
Sharon Godwin (Not Pictured)  
and Diane Bald



**Monday Morning  
Mother’s  
Day Out**  
Diane Bald and  
Deb Kovama



**Wednesday  
Morning  
Mother’s  
Day Out**  
Diane Bald and  
Deb Kovama



the four main services planned for inclusion in the new Lutheran hymnal due to be released by the LCMS in 2007. The others will be an alternative new service introduced in *Hymnal Supplement 98*, and the slight revision of "Page 15" from *The Lutheran Hymnal* that we have been using in booklet form.

As we learn these and other service orders planned for the new hymnal we will rotate among them, with occasional other formats, to provide for rich variety in our worship.

*"I will sing a new song unto you, O God" (Psalm 144:9).*



The Children's Christmas Program, for both the Sunday School and Preschool, will be held on Sunday, December 14 at 4:00pm. It will feature favorite songs and hymns by both the children and congregation and the Christmas story read by the older children.

Please come to show your support for our Sunday School and Preschool.



## Missionaries of the Month

Each month we remember in prayer in our worship specific missionaries sponsored around the world by our congregation, through our Synod and related organizations. You are encour-



Bring Your Family and Guests to Celebrate the Real "Reason for the Season"

Christmas Eve, Wednesday, December 24  
Family Service at 7:00pm  
"Midnight Mass" at 11:30pm

Enjoy Your Favorite Christmas Carols Including "Silent Night" by Candlelight

*All Invited — Everyone Welcome!*

## Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful!

aged to remember them also in your personal and family prayers.

December 7  
*Morris & Jean Olson*  
*Kazakhstan*

This portion of the former Soviet Union had a large Lutheran population before the Communist purges and with freedom again the Lutheran Church is experiencing a great resurgence. Pray for the success and safety of our dozens of missionaries and their dependents throughout the former Soviet Union.

December 15  
*Rev. Glenn & Susan Fluegge*  
*Togo*

Rev. Fluegge is director of the Lutheran seminary for French-speaking pastors in West Africa. Please pray for the growth of this seminary and the African Lutheran churches which support it.

December 21  
*David Ernst*  
*Venezuela*

David is an agricultural missionary sharing his expertise with Venezuelan

farmers. Pray that their poverty might be eased by his labors.

December 28  
*Jill Horn*  
*Guatemala*

Jill teaches at the Christian Academy. Pray that her students may receive with faith the message of Jesus that she shares with them.

## Flower Calendar

Thank you for these flower donations to beautify our worship during October, November and December. Additional donations not on this list will be included in next month's newsletter.

A sign-up sheet to provide flowers for worship is on the bulletin board. These will be listed in the bulletin and newsletter. Occasions to remember include anniversaries, birthdays, in memory of loved ones, etc. Flowers

may be obtained anywhere and you may provide your own vase or use one of the assortment in the church kitchen.

A separate, special sign-up sheet has been posted for poinsettia donations.

October 5

Doug & Janet Martin  
Wedding Anniversary

October 19

Rev. Kevin & Terese Vogts  
Thanks for Blessings

November 2

Rev. Kevin & Terese Vogts  
In Memory of Leroy Vogts  
and Grandparents

November 9

Doug & Sue Jansen  
Honoring All Veterans

November 16

Mabel Schibonski  
95th Birthday

November 23

Paul & Diana Kaardahl  
10th Wedding Anniversary

Joey & Marcy Shcroeder  
New Member Sunday

December 7

Jim & Rose Rosenbaum  
In Memory of Father

December 21

Mike & Daniell Bargstadt  
Girl's Baptism & Ben's Birthday



December 3 (Advent Service)  
Kylie Martin

December 7  
Austin Munns

December 10 (Advent Service)  
Sarah Vogts

## 2003 Wednesday Advent Services



# SONGS OF THE SEASON

Brief Meditations on Your Favorite Christmas Carols  
Wednesdays in December at 7:00pm

December 3—Advent Service I

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” and  
“O Little Town of Bethlehem”

December 10, 2003—Advent Service II

“Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Immanuel” and  
“Joy to the World, the Lord is Come”

December 17, 2003—Advent Service III

“What Child Is This” and “Silent Night”

December 14

Casey Johnson

December 17 (Advent Service)

Kendall Martin

December 21

Morgan Kaardahl

December 24 (Christmas Eve)

Jacob Vogts

December 28

Alex Kaardahl

literature in the languages of developing countries around the world. Nearly 200 works have been translated and published in over 30 languages.



The Swahili Translation Project Executive Committee proudly display copies of the newly published Small Catechism. Dr. Anssi Simojoki, fourth from right, serves as LHF Vice President for Africa and coordinates Swahili projects. The Catechism booklet has been re-printed three times with over 150,000 copies now in circulation across East Africa.

Recently, LHF announced the publication of Luther's Small Catechism into the language of the Twi speaking people of Ghana, Africa. Other languages in which the Small Catechism have already been published by LHF include Arabic, Belarusian, Chinese, Creole, Estonian, Luganda, Sinhala, Sukuma, Swahili, Thai, Ukrainian, Vietnamese, and Zande.



The special mission of the Lutheran Heritage Foundation, a Registered Service Organization in partnership with the LCMS, is producing doctrinally sound devotional, education and theological



The Twi live in the southern part of Ghana and they call themselves the Akan. There are many groups that constitute the Akan people. They can be divided and subdivided into the Fante, Akim, Asante, Juaben, and Agona people.

The symbol of the Akan people is the Kente fabric, the cultural identity and landmark symbol of the Akan people. The production of this Kente dates from the past 600 years. Historically, the Kente assisted in serving as a goal of healing and unifying the fragmented elements of the Akan People into a whole, a nation.

The Akan people have lived and ruled their land for hundreds of years before they experienced the consecutive disruptions by Arab, Portuguese, Dutch, and British invasion and domination. As a result of the slave trade, many of the Africans throughout the Diaspora are direct descendents of the Akan people of Ghana.

Today, the Akans number about 8 million, out of a the 20 million inhabitants of Ghana. The Asantes, the Akims and the Juabens constitute about 4.3 million, the Fantes about 2.8 million while the Akwapims number around 900,000. The Twi language is used for education through university, and in mother tongue authored literature. Over 80% of the Twi population is literate either in English or Twi.

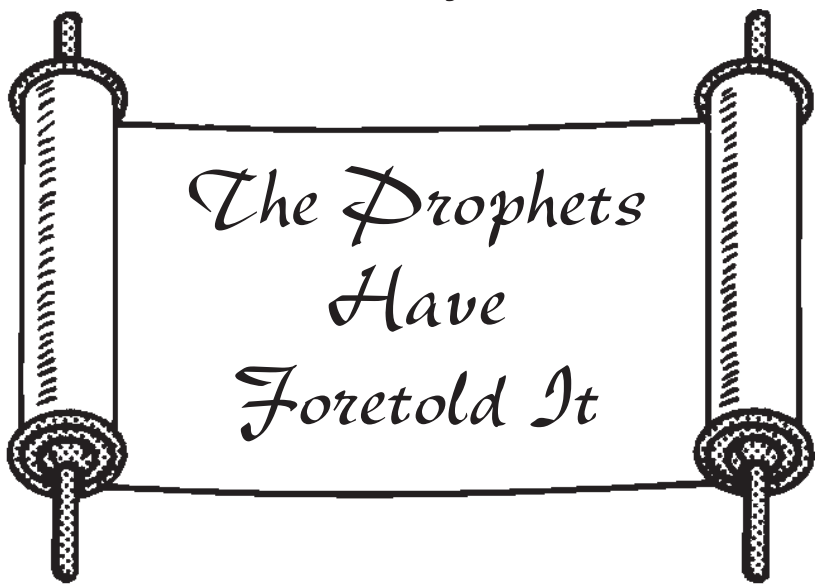
So many members give generously to Holy Cross of their time, talents and treasure. These are just a few

About 60% of Akans claim to be Christians. Pray that through Luther's Small Catechism that the Spirit will bring many to know of their salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus alone.

### **Holy Cross Group Enjoys Luther Movie**

Sixteen members of Holy Cross braved the ice and snow to join a large crowd for one of four performances of the new movie "Luther" at the Orpheum Theater in Sioux City. It gave us a deeper appreciation for the origins of our Lutheran Church. Afterward we

## 2003 Advent Sunday Sermon Series



November 30

*"The Prophets Have Foretold It"*  
Jeremiah 33:14-16

December 7

*"Immanuel—God with Us"*  
Isaiah 7:10-14

December 14

*"Hail the Sun of Righteousness"*  
Malachi 4:2

December 21

*"A Major Message  
from a Minor Prophet"*  
Micah 5:2

enjoyed dinner together at Famous Dave's.

Our congregation will get this movie when it comes out on DVD and plan to use it for a Bible class on Luther and the Reformation.



Over the years members have given regularly and generously of their time, talents and treasure to make the ministry of Holy Cross possible. These are just a few thanks for some recent efforts:

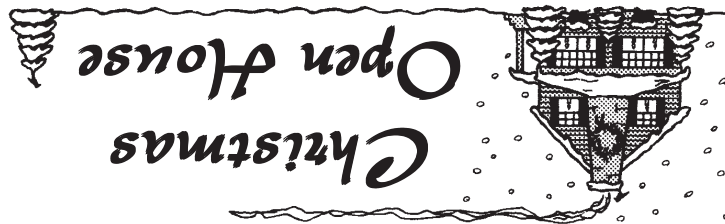
- Jane Michels and family for donation and planting shrubs near the pond in memory of her husband Jim.

- Jeri Melstad's sister for crafting and donating a beautiful Reformation banner.
- Mabel Schibonski for a donation in honor of her 95th Birthday to begin a stained-glass window project.
- All who helped make the Soup Supper a success by working and donating items.
- Doug Jansen for constructing the fence to conceal the dumpster.
- Rev. Kevin & Terese Vogts for donation of a large Holy Family set for use in the church.
- Don Schmidt, father of Terese Vogts, for donation of a stand for plants and the Advent Wreath.
- Joan Kammerer for filling in as guest pianist with only two hour's notice.

Apologies to anyone left off this list, and please let Pastor Vogts know of other words of special thanks.

*All Invited - Everyone Welcome!*

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Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church  
**Crossnotes**

Rev. Kevin Vogts, Pastor  
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