

Calvary Leaders Proactively Respond to Water Discovery – October 2017

This letter is an update for the Calvary community regarding our participation in an ongoing state water study.

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), at the request of the Minnesota Legislature, is undergoing a research project to study the occurrence of viruses in the groundwater. As part of the study, the MDH conducted a random sample study of public water systems, which included factories, schools, and churches across the state that are not connected to a treatment/disinfection system.

Calvary was randomly selected to participate in the study, and we voluntarily agreed to be part of this research. From May 2014 through April 2016, water was sampled every other month. The study looked at how often evidence of certain microbes (viruses, bacteria, and other indicators) occurred in the groundwater. Results from the first year of the state-wide virus study were released by the MDH on March 10, 2017 and results for the second year were just received.

The results for Calvary showed a presence of different microbes in the water at various times during both years of the testing period. Although testing showed evidence that microbes are able to get into the drinking water sources, researchers do not know if the microbes can cause illness. (See MDH links below.) The MDH did a community illness study this summer, and the results were not conclusive because the findings were not statistically significant.

It is important to note that microbes in water sources can appear and disappear very quickly. Weather conditions, volume and proximity of wastewater and manure near the well, and well usage patterns can affect the results. Further analyses by the MDH will examine these issues. Several reports and resources are listed at the end of this letter.

Studying for viruses in water is a new science, and researchers have much yet to learn. Calvary's voluntary participation in the research study is providing the state with valuable data about its drinking water. We will continue to work closely with the MDH as the process continues.

Even though the results of the study are inconclusive, the church council and staff of Calvary have opted to be proactive in response to the ongoing research, and we have developed a plan to ensure that the drinking water at our facility is safe and healthy. We have applied to the MDH for a grant to help cover the cost of a new well that will be located further away from potential sources of contamination and uphill from driveway runoff. The new well should be completed in May 2018. In the meantime, we will install two reverse osmosis (RO) systems; RO is one of the drinking water solutions recommended by MDH. One system will be installed to service the water fountains in the rear of the building. One will be installed in the kitchen and service the front water fountains, the sink by the small coffee maker, the ice machine and be available for general kitchen use. All drinking water should come from one of these sources until the new well is complete.

We are glad that our Calvary building is a gathering place for church members, preschoolers, and many other people from our community, and we're committed to working for the spiritual and physical health of all those who come through our doors. The water study gives us a good opportunity to be proactive in our care for one another. We're grateful that we're in a position to respond, and we're confident that we have a good plan for moving forward. Check out the resources below if you'd like to learn more. Please be in touch if you have any questions or concerns.

Nancy Schram, church council president, and Pastor Genelle Netland, senior pastor

You can learn more about the virus study and our results from these resources:

- The MDH Drinking Water Protection office at (651) 201-4700
- [MDH Virus Study Talking Points](#)
- The Groundwater Virus Monitoring website at http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/water/dwp_cwl/virus/index.html.
- [Viruses in Drinking Water Sources from the MDH](#)
- MDH Press Release from March 10, 2017 <http://www.health.state.mn.us/news/pressrel/2017/publicwells031017.html>
- [MDH virus study results](#) for Calvary Lutheran Church, Bemidji
- [The MDH Glossary](#), which provides an overview of viruses and potential symptoms