



Montana Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

News of the Week, April 13, 2016

In this issue

[Prayers](#)

[Words from the Bishop](#)

[Water Project Update](#)

[Take it Now!](#)

[Out of Darkness](#)

[Travel to Germany with Bishop Crist](#)

[Tax Information](#)

[New LPA Class](#)

[Luther 500](#)

[Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp](#)

[Upcoming Events](#)

[Amazon Smile](#)

Prayers for April 17, 2016

Third Sunday of Easter

Please remember in your prayers this week:

Jan and Jake Block (former Vice President of Synod), for health issues, including a newly broken leg (Jan)

Pr. Char Schmiedeskamp (Harlowton, Barber, Lennep), as she begins radiation for breast cancer.



From the Montana Synod Prayer Calendar:

Jocko Valley Lutheran, Arlee
Valley of Christ Lutheran, Frenchtown
Prince of Peace Lutheran, Missoula

Sapphire Lutheran Homes (Hamilton)

Southwest Minnesota Synod

[Join the Montana Synod Staff in wearing orange today to call attention to childhood hunger.](#)



Words From the Bishop - Deepen faith and witness - Gratitude

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18)

Gratitude is a faith practice. Sometimes we think gratitude is simply saying "Thank you." My parents taught us to say "please" and "thank you." And we taught our children to say "please" and "thank you." Good manners are the foundation of a civil society, and we could all use a refresher course, especially in this political climate. Good manners are not the cure to all of society's ills-but they are a start.

Good manners involve reciprocity. You do something for someone else, and they do it for you. The "Golden Rule," which has parallels in almost every religious tradition, says, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Luke 6:31) Just about everybody agrees that it is a common-sense moral guide, as universally applicable as "Do no harm."

But Jesus, immediately after pronouncing "Do unto others as you would have them do to you," in Luke's Gospel, immediately goes way beyond it. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them." (v. 32).

Jesus goes beyond reciprocity and good manners, into deep commitment. And that is what gratitude is. It is far more than an automatic "thank you." Gratitude is a whole way of life that is learned. Gratitude is knowing that everything that we have and that everything we are comes from God. Gratitude is finding grace and the hand of God in everything we experience. Gratitude is what enabled Martin Rinkhart to write "Now Thank We All Our God," in the midst of an epidemic that took his wife and children. Gratitude is what made it possible for South Africans under the yoke of Apartheid to sing, "We are Marching in the Light."

Gratitude is not rosy optimism or shallow happiness. Gratitude embraces pain and sorrow, and sees God's love through it all. How many times have you heard someone say, "I would never have wanted this, but I have been so changed and so blessed throughout it." That is gratitude, born out of grief, born out of experience.

Gratitude is a response to love, to grace, to life. It is a way of life. It is thankfulness, generosity,



trust and joy. There are no "buts" with gratitude. Gratitude is complete. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians he writes: "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus." (I Corinthians 1: 4-5) His gratitude does not prevent him from admonishing them harshly immediately thereafter.

Gratitude is not a behavior. It is an orientation, an approach to life. It doesn't dull the senses or cloud the judgment. Rather it is an interpretive lens through which we view and experience all of life. It is extravagant, and it is counter-cultural. There is nothing rational about gratitude. In the end, it is a gift.

Henri Nouwen decided to leave his comfortable academic appointment and live among the poorest of the poor in Latin America. He went to help because he had so much to offer and they were in so much need. Instead he learned that these people whom he imagined had nothing were always giving to others, always grateful to others. Whatever they had they shared, and gratefully. He called his book *Gracias!*, because that's what he heard everywhere he went. "Gracias!" Not desperate, not pleading, but confident, joyous. Gratitude. It is a faith practice.

Jessica Crist, Bishop

A reminder: Please send in your Rostered Leader reports to the Bishop ASAP. We have had a great response so far, so keep them coming!

Water Project Photos



Make sure to visit the [Montana Synod website](#) for photos and updates on our ongoing water project in Bolivia!

Lutheran Seminary Award to St. John's "Community of the Cross"

The Reverend Dr. James Nieman, President of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, recently announced that St. John's Lutheran Ministries has been selected as 2016 recipient of a prestigious award. Within a February 19th letter addressed to St. John's President and Chief Executive Officer, Kent Burgess, President Nieman wrote:

"It is my pleasure to inform you that the faculty of the Lutheran School of Theology at

Chicago (LSTC) has voted to honor St. John's Lutheran Ministries with the Community of the Cross award . . . presented to a community, institution, congregation, or any collectively functioning Christian group whose activities manifest the invitation of our Lord to take up the cross and follow him, and whose services is directed to the world around it, both Christian and non-Christian, and whose satisfaction and honor dearly derive from the gospel."

President Nieman stated of this award, "It is the highest group honor our faculty can bestow, reflecting the respect and esteem with which they regard the recipient." In telling why LSTC faculty voted to confer this award to St. John's, he observed these reasons:

- * Since its founding in 1963 by twenty-three Lutheran congregations of Montana, the work of St. John's now spans the entire state of Montana and offers a wide array of services to people without regard to religious preference, race, gender, age, diagnosis, or disability.
- * Through its multiple campuses across the state, St. John's provides a full continuum of senior living care, and through its facilities in Billings, it shows a model of intergenerational engagement that includes both children and senior adults.
- * St. John's has managed Lutheran Social Services of Montana, which has provided mental health counseling services, adoptive services, disaster response work, and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee services.
- * St. John's became the second organization within the United States to develop Green House Cottages, a model for long-term care designed to provide a home environment.
- * Since 2003, St. John's in collaboration with local ELCA congregations, served as a learning context for a dozen seminary interns, half of whom were from LSTC.
- * St. John's has been an active ecumenical partner as well as supportive of and welcoming to people from all faith traditions, including those who identify as non-religious.
- * In these and many other ways, St. John's stands as a model of bearing the cross in daily life through being an exemplary social service ministry. All of this embodies LSTC's own commitment to prepare leaders for a public church.

President Nieman concluded, "Please accept my sincere congratulations on the selection of St. John's Lutheran Ministries for this year's Community of the Cross award."

Within reply, Kent Burgess wrote, "The honor of receiving the Community of the Cross award is deeply appreciated by the St. John's community. Our sincere thanks to LSTC and the faculty for this award and for the recognition and encouragement it gives to our ministry across Montana and Northern Wyoming."

On Sunday, May 15, 2016, Kent will receive this award on behalf of St. John's during commencement exercises at LSTC.

Mara Flynn
Graphic Designer
St. John's Foundation
406-655-5716

Portico Update

As of April 1, 2016, the Montana Synod has reached 47.86%. Thank you to the 56 of you who have taken the Health Assessment through Portico. We only need 21 more of you to reach 65% and collectively, congregations and ministries in the Montana Synod will save \$11,000 on contributions this year.



PLUS, you automatically receive \$150 immediately just for taking it, and a potential additional \$250 if you complete the GO! Challenge to create a healthy, lasting lifestyle change. Hurry, the deadline is April 30, 2016, so there are only a few more weeks.

FOR EVERY
HOUSE
IS BUILT BY
SOMEONE,
BUT THE
BUILDER
OF ALL
THINGS IS
GOD.

HEBREWS 3:4

Previous news and notes:

Attention: Portico Members over 50

Ministry of the ELCA

You're invited to participate in a new opportunity for plan members age 50+ or within 15 years of retirement. We converted our popular day-long pre-retirement seminar into a convenient online webinar series. We're offering this series for the second time nationwide this spring.

The three webinar sessions will cover a variety of retirement topics, from health care options to Social Security. Sessions will feature live presenters from Portico and Ernst & Young, as well as live Q&A - all at no cost to you. Sign up for the series and join us for as many sessions as you can. As this is a series, you will receive the most benefit from participating in all three sessions.

Session 1: Retirement Planning and Health Care, April 12, 2 - 3 p.m. (Central)
Explore these retirement planning questions and more:

- What might my budget look like in retirement?
- Will I be eligible for housing allowance in retirement?
- What health care options do I have in retirement?

Session 2: Investments and Accumulations, April 19, 2 - 3 p.m. (Central)
Explore these investment questions and more:

- How can I manage my investment risks?
- What investment options are available in the ELCA Retirement Plan?
- What resources are available to help me determine which investments are right for me?
-

Session 3: Income in Retirement, April 26, 2 - 3 p.m. (Central)
Explore these retirement income questions and more:

- What distribution options do I have from my ELCA retirement account?
- What strategies should I know so that I can maximize my Social Security payment?
- How might I use different sources of retirement income to fund my retirement?

> [Register for the series!](#)

Out of the Darkness

by Cindy Bye
Shepherd, MT



"I came out of the darkness and into the light." These were the words proclaimed by a woman at the Iglesia Evangelica Luterana Boliviana (IELB) National Women's Leadership Conference at the Jessica Crist Retreat Center in August 2015. With passionate testimony, she revealed the joy and peace she received when she accepted Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior. The movement of the Holy Spirit through the room was almost palpable, as she shared her life-changing story of coming to faith.

To read more, [click here](#).

Prison Ministry Partnership

In June 2015, shortly after the Montana Synod of the ELCA celebrated their new partnership with Intermountain, caring for children and families at risk, Bishop Jessica Crist of the ELCA invited Bishop Elain Stanovsky of the United Methodist Church to explore how the Lutherans and Methodists in Montana could work together in prison ministries. The Rev. David Burt, Assistant to Bishop Stanovsky and the Rev. George Karres, Director of Evangelism and Missions for the ELCA were asked to pull together a group from both churches to begin this task. Representatives of the UMC (Rev. David Andersen of Butte and Pastor Wendy Ochs of Billings) and the ELCA (Rev. Joel Skindlov of Big Sandy and Havre and Rev. Melanie Martin-Dent, an ELCA pastor serving in interim ministry at the UMC church in Dillon) began to meet via conference call, getting to know each other and the ministries they are engaged in. YACUMC Vital Missions Coordinator Sally McConnell and Freedom in Christ pastor Rev. Rob Nebalek will be joining the next call.

In February, the group adopted the name "Prison Ministry Partnership" and the

purpose of exploring our common ministries and sharing opportunities to work together in this area. We intend to communicate information to the people in our respective churches about ways they can engage in and support this work. Three ministries which have been identified as starting points include:

-Freedom in Christ Prison Ministry in which Pastor Rob Nedbalek (ELCA) serves at the Men's State Prison in Deer Lodge, Montana

-Ministries at the Women's State Prison in Billings including monthly worship services led by members of Billings Evangelical UMC and chaplaincy work by TEEM Candidate Charles Bott

-Healing Communities Montana: a group of people from congregations from various denominations who have participated in training led by Rev. Doug Walker, UMC General Board of Church and Society.

This month we wanted to introduce this group and our work. Next month we will begin offering opportunities to get involved with each ministry. For now, we invite your prayers for our task force and for all engaged in ministry with people involved with the criminal justice system.

You may learn more about all these ministries by going to the Freedom in Christ website:

<http://www.ficprisonministry.com>

Healing Communities website: <http://umc-gbcs.org/healing-communities>

or contacting Wendy Ochs pastorwendyochs@gmail.com

or Charles Bott Cajun_nomo@yahoo.com.

Travel to Germany with Bishop Crist!

[Click Here](#) for information about a Montana Synod trip to Germany to visit Reformation sites in May of 2017. Join Bishop Crist and others from around the Synod on this trip to Wittenberg.



Montana Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

**The 500th Anniversary of
Martin Luther's 95 Theses (1517-2017)**

May 9-18, 2017

**Travel to Germany
With Bishop Crist**

The Montana Synod is offering a chance to tour Germany to celebrate the 500th Anniversary of Martin Luther's Nailing of the 95 Theses to the doors of the All Saints Church in Wittenberg.

Pastor Paul Rowold of Polson will be leading a Pilgrimage to Germany, Palestine, and Israel from October 4-18. He has led numerous groups in the past, and emphasizes renewal of body and spirit, with significant contact with the Christian peoples in each country. Included in this trip are guided visits to the major Reformation sites (including Erfurt, Mansfield, Eisleben, Wittenberg, and Eisenach, with the Wartburg Castle) and the significant sites in the Holy Land. Visits to the homes of Christian families and worship in Bethlehem and Eisenach will highlight this Pilgrimage.

The 15 day experience departs from New York JFK and includes breakfasts and dinners at 4 star hotels each day. Cost is \$3225 per person (based on double occupancy). For detailed itinerary, contact Pastor Rowold at 406 883 5864 or paul.rowold@gmail.com



Exploring Transitions: Life's Detours and Roadblocks

April 25-27

Led by Tammy Devine & Tom Morgan, with worship/music by Michael Larson
Detour ahead. Road closed. Throughout life's journey, we encounter unexpected turns in direction: Illness, loss of loved ones, change of work and opportunity. A loss of direction is disorienting. Together, we will explore this time of transition.

This is part of the Transitions Series: for those who are either nearing or currently living in their 3rd Chapter of Life. It is one of a 4-parts series of retreats to explore personal life callings, passions, meaning, and purpose. Each workshop stands alone, so you can join in at any time.

[More details, costs and registration page](#)

Health Coverage Tax information

This year, for the first time, you'll need to report health coverage when you file your federal income tax return, or potentially pay a financial penalty (unless you had Medicare as your primary coverage). This new requirement is part of the Affordable Care Act (ACA); you may have heard it called the "individual mandate."

Portico is here to help. We're mailing you a tax form that serves as proof of health coverage. Here's what to do:

- Watch the mail for Internal Revenue Service Form 1095-B, Health Coverage. It shows the months that you and any covered family members had ELCA-Primary health benefits in 2015.
- **Keep Form 1095-B for your records. You don't need to submit it with your 2015 tax return.**
- **Check a box on your 2015 tax return to indicate you had coverage.**

If you have any questions, call Portico at 800.352.2876. They are there to help you navigate an ever-changing health care landscape, so you can stay focused on your ministry. 800.352.2876

Andrea Arey

Regional Representative Regions 1 & 2 | Customer Outreach
Portico Benefit Services | A Ministry of the ELCA

New LPA Class - Fall 2016

2016-2018 Lay Pastoral Associate Class Nominations

Now is the time to consider lifting up individuals with the gifts and skills for the Montana Synod Lay Pastoral Associate program (LPA). The next class will begin in October 2016, but now is the time to be educating those in the congregation about the LPA program, and seeking their commitment.

The congregational meeting is a good opportunity to nominate and support those in your congregation who have the desire and skills to serve as an LPA in the Montana Synod. At this annual meeting the congregation can pray for and, with the guidance of the pastor, recommend individuals to the Bishop for approval.

For more information, go to the [Montana Synod website](#) or call Pr. Jason Asselstine, Associate to the Bishop.

Interested in becoming an LPA?

1. Talk to your church pastor. Talk about what it means to fill in for him or her and the traits it takes to provide pastoral leadership (albeit, temporary).
2. If your church does not have a pastor, feel free to contact our office. We'll put you in touch with someone who can shed some light on the role of an LPA.
3. **Have your church pastor contact Bishop Crist or Rev. Jason Asselstine, Assoc. to the Bishop via email or phone call. This contact and conversation will be your pastor's recommendation for your participation in the MT Synod LPA program.**

After approval from the Bishop (to enter the program), please ensure you have the following items to our Synod office at least 3 weeks prior to the class start date (our staff admin person will send you the paperwork to begin the process):

1. Completed biographical, information sheet.
2. Initiation of a required background check
3. First year's payment of \$200 via check made out to "MT Synod" with "LPA training program" in the check's memo section. This can also be brought with you to the 1st group retreat.

Still have questions? Call our Synod office at 406-453-1461

Women's Spring Retreat

April 22-24, 2016
Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp

SAVE THE DATE! Plan now to attend the WOMEN'S WOMEN'S RETREAT. Motivating speaker, Fun, Fellowship, Service projects, Music, Great food (no cooking!).... Bring your friends, daughters, mothers, granddaughters (14 and up) along for a fun, restful, spirit-filled weekend on beautiful Flathead Lake. Check out www.imluchurch.org/womensretreat for more details, to get on our mailing list and to register! Hope to see you there. Sponsored by the Five Valleys Women and Great Divide Clusters.



NRIT News:

The following events require pre-registration:

NRIT is entering the world of digital education. Our first digital offering is now available on our website. When you purchase the class, you will have access to it throughout 2016 so can offer the class as a multi-session adult study or watch it on your personal computer at your convenience.

DIGITAL EDUCATION

Learning Our Place: Wilderness and Wonder from a Biblical Perspective

With Dr. Kathryn Schifferdecker This course explores the book of Job and several biblical texts for insights about God, creation and humanity. What kind of world is this? What is our place in this world? How does the Bible speak of wilderness and wild creatures? What about "acts of God?"

To purchase the class, go the NRIT website. Under the logo, to the right side, click on NRIT Digital Education Store. Then click on "Learning Our Place..." You will need to pay online with a credit or debit card. After you have placed your order, you will be sent an email with all of the access information. Look for more offerings to come!

COMING WORKSHOPS:

Spiritual But Not Religious: What Can We Learn From Them? How Can We Welcome Them? Dr. Melinda Quivik

Monday, April 25th - American Lutheran in Billings

Friday, April 29th - St. John's Lutheran in Helena

9:30am - 3:30pm

(5 credits) \$75 clergy/\$50 New to Ministry, retired, LPA/\$20 for nonrostered no CEUs

Leading Worship Matters: Shaping Faith

Dr. Melinda Quivik

Tuesday, April 26th - First Lutheran in Wolf Point

Thursday, April 27th - New Hope in Great Falls

9:30am - 3:30 pm

(5 credits) \$75 clergy/\$50 New to Ministry, retired, LPA/\$20 for nonrostered no CEUs

To sign up, www.nrit.org and click on the NRIT logo near the upper right side of the Montana Synod page to see our offerings.

SCHOLARSHIPS

We know that some churches are not able to provide the recommended amount of continuing education assistance and what is offered doesn't always go far enough. At the same time, we strongly believe in the importance of continuing education for our synod and we support the ELCA expectation of 50 hours of continuing education credits a year.

- Scholarships are now available to cover half the cost of NRIT events.
- Apply online or by leaving a message for Jenny at 406-453-1461.

*NRIT is grateful for financial gifts in support of this scholarship fund. Designate by writing

"Classical Artist Scholarship Fund" in the memo line

The Luther 500

The Reformation 500 Task Force is looking for people to serve with our group. The only requirement is an interest in Reformation history and how the church is continually reforming. Many of our meetings are held via Google Hangouts so that very little lengthy travel is necessary, also helping to fulfill the first benchmark of the Montana Synod, "Meet the future boldly." If you would like to join our fun group, please contact Rev. Tonya Eza.

In conjunction with the Montana Synod's third strategic benchmark, "Deepen faith and witness," the 2016 Synod Assembly and Theological Conference theme will be the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. Yes, it's a year early, but this is part of how we meet the future boldly, so that when 2017 comes along, we will all be prepared! In conjunction with the Synod Assembly, the Reformation 500 Task Force is sponsoring a Reformation stole and banner contest. We invite the member congregations of the Montana Synod to bring original stoles and/or banners with them to the Synod Assembly in June. Following are the rules that we ask you to follow:

If you are making a stole:

- Stoles must be able to be worn while presiding over worship, and should be able to withstand 10 worship services (feel free to experiment with materials!).
- Stoles should be between 3" and 6" wide at the shoulder, and between 48" and 54" long.
 - o Be sure also to consider weight of stole and range of motion for the pastor in your design.

Stoles need to be appropriate for a liturgically red service

- o Red doesn't need to be the only color in the stole, but it should play a prominent role in the color palette of the stole.
- The stole should be your own original design - it is fine to use established patterns (provided they are not copy-written) as long as they are put together in your own way.

If you are submitting a banner:

- Banners should be appropriate for display in a worship context
 - o The size of the banner should be able to fit comfortably within the dimensions of your sanctuary.
- Banners should be of an original design. You may use established patterns (provided they are not copy-written) as long as they are put together in your own way.

Please bring the stoles and banners with you to the Synod Assembly, and they will be displayed in a place where everyone can see. Assembly attendees will vote on their favorites.

Questions? Please contact Rev. Tonya Eza, chair of the Reformation 500 Task Force, or any of the other members of the group.

Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp **Retreats, Events, and Updates:**

For additional information about these great upcoming retreats and events, check out our website at www.flbc.net! Also, watch for our 2016 Summer Brochure around Christmas! Be sure to register early for your first choice of weeks and programs!



April 17-19: Adult Spirituality Retreat

This year's inspiring retreat will be co-presented by Dr. Jim and Julie Aageson, with the topics, "Spiritual but not Religious: Spirituality in a Non-Religious World" and "Quest for God: Contemplative Practices and a Life of Faith." [CLICK HERE](#) for more information! There is still time to register!

May 8: Mother's Day Brunch

Celebrate the special women in your life by joining us for a delightful brunch at camp. Four seatings are available, and reservations are required. Call (406) 752-6602 by May 2nd to make your reservation. Suggested donation is \$20 per person. Proceeds benefit the the FLBC campership fund and the CASA program of Flathead County, assisting young women in foster care. [CLICK HERE](#) for more information!

May 27-30: Thrivent Memorial Day Family Work Retreat

Fun (and work!) for the whole family as we prepare our facilities for the summer camping season! This is a great time to introduce your children to camp and to meet our 2016 summer staff, who are eager to work, worship, and play with you! Call (406) 752-6602 to reserve your spot. This retreat is FREE in thankfulness for your assistance and funding from Thrivent Financial.

June 3-5: Women's Retreat

Calling all women! Join us for worship, great food, relaxation, yoga, spa time, and sessions with Dr. Nancy Eldredge-Hess, who will lead us in the theme, "Unsung Heroines of the Bible." [CLICK HERE](#) for more information!

[Rev. Nathan Clements, Associate Director](#)
[Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp](#)
[603 S Main St](#)
[Kalispell, MT 59901](#)
[\(406\) 890-5104 \(cell\)](#)

Upcoming Events, etc.

June

3-5 Montana Synod Assembly



Please put these important dates on your calendar:

2016 Montana Synod Assembly and Theological Conference: June 3-5, 2016, Radisson Hotel Billings

2016 Bishop's Convocation, October 14, 2016, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Helena, Montana

2016 First Call Theological Education: November 7-9, 2016, Great Falls

2017 Montana Synod Assembly: June 1-4, 2017, Best Western Heritage Inn, Great Falls

2017 First Call Theological Education: November 6-8, 2017, Great Falls

~~~~~  
Find upcoming issues of **The Parish Paper** [here](#)

To see what's coming up on the Montana Synod Calendar, go [here](#)

To download or view our Clergy Roster, Congregational and LPA Directories, find them [here](#)

Roster Transitions are updated mid-month and may be found [here](#)

---

## Amazon Smile

Shop at <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/36-3514273> in support of the Montana Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.



*This e-letter is intended to convey information from synod staff, ministries and congregations, and we reserve the right to edit all submissions. All items must be received by the Monday before publication on Wednesday. Send submissions to [Colter McCarty](#).*

## **Contact Information**

phone: (406) 453-1461

[www.montanasynod.org](http://www.montanasynod.org)

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)