



Montana Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Equipping for Ministry

News of the Week December 1, 2021

Prayers of the Week

Please remember in your prayers this week:

Messiah Lutheran Church in Billings officially closed on Nov. 30, 2021. Please pray for those who made the decision to close the congregation and those who grieve the ending of their ministry. We give thanks to God for the legacy shared from this ministry that will impact many in the days, months and years to come.



From the Montana Synod Prayer Calendar:

Messiah Lutheran Church, Billings
American Lutheran Church, Billings

Southern Ohio Synod
Southwest California Synod

Words from the Bishop: All Earth is Hopeful?

“All Earth is Hopeful.” Or so says the Advent hymn. (ELW #266) But is it? Somedays it doesn’t feel like any of the earth is hopeful much less all of it.

Advent is a church season that focuses on Hope and Preparation for the arrival of God’s anointed one. Not just for Christ’s first coming in the stable long ago but for the next and hopefully last coming of the Savior of all the Earth. But how can we prepare if we don’t have

hope?

Hope is hard, especially these days. We're constantly bombarded with stories and bad news of death, destruction and despair. Misinformation and outright lies abound. Trust in anyone or anything, including the God of Jesus Christ, is eroding to be replaced with worldly chaos, fear, idolatry, and shame-filled attacks on anyone who is or thinks differently.



It doesn't end there. Omicron has arrived to take delta's place as the new Covid threat which is just leading to more uncertainty and "breaking news" media panic. People are driving cars into Christmas parades and other people are shooting one another, including once again at another school. Violence of words and weapons seems the standard solution of the day for far too many people across our nation and our world. Smash and grab stealing is the new entertainment of choice. And the climate is unpredictable and seems uncooperative to our comfy ways of living that we are unwilling to change.

How do we find hope in the midst of so much trauma, suffering and death? We know we can't go back to some pseudo-mythical time of glory which never existed. But how do we go forward or prepare for anything if we're stuck in despair?

And yet we – as people of faith in Jesus Christ; as followers of Christ on his way – we are called to Hope. More than that, we are gifted with Hope. Hope is a freely given blessing of the Holy Spirit like faith (trust) and love when open ourselves up to it.

In the gospel lesson from Luke last Sunday, Jesus announced, "Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Lk 21:28) Don't cower in terror. Don't wallow in the pain. Don't turn and run. No, stand up and face forward. Because what you've been hoping for is coming. The new life you've be re-deemed with is near. In the midst of all the struggles and traumas and suffering of the human experience, the Savior comes at last. Hope wins again! But what does this Hope look like as we stand up and face the seemingly hopeless world? It's not blind optimism or wishful thinking. Hope recognizes reality and sees the pain of the world. Hope grieves the death and laments the losses. Hope acknowledges the suffering of the Earth and all that lives upon it. Hope experiences anger and anxiety and even fear. Hope sees the truth of what is and does not pretend it is something it is not.

But hope stands and faces forward anyway. Hope does not wallow in suffering or let it rule our lives, our choices, our trust in the God of Jesus Christ. Hope refuses to be overwhelmed by fear, despair or rage at a seemingly hopeless world. Hope, though constantly victimized, is resilient and does not allow the status of "victim" to become its identity. Hope never turns to violence, cynicism, bitterness or so many other gods of this world as the solution to its problems.

Hope stands up and faces the earth. Hope sees the light at the end of the tunnel even without eyes. Hope says to suffering and violence and death, "You will not win! Jesus says so!" Hope through faith clings to the resurrection even while hanging on the cross or weeping beneath it. Hope keeps its eyes open and constantly seeks God's new life in this world and the next. Hope lives in the glimpses and instances of salvation that are always around us when we're willing to see. No matter what, Hope clings to God's possibilities and searches for God's opportunities.

"Hope comes in the act of taking the next step," Karl Barth once said. [\[1\]](#) How is about moving forward into God's future. Hope takes one step forward, then another, then another even in the midst of the most traumatic of times. Hope owns the truth of the past and learns from it. But hope does not let the past, its blessings or its sins, control the future. Hope exists in and for the present, welcoming God's future that

has become incarnate, each moment taking another step towards that future no matter how small. For that Hope, whose name is Jesus, the Christ, has chosen to dwell with us in our suffering while always leading us toward the light at the end of the tunnel, inviting us into Love, Joy, Peace, Kindness, and yes, more Hope.

Hope is the Spirit's gift to us...when we open ourselves up to Christ. It's in Hope and only in this Hope that we prepare for "God with us" to arrive, knowing through a faith saturated with the promise of God's good news in Jesus that our Hope will never be in vain.

May your hearts and minds be blessed with the fullness of Hope this Advent season!

Bishop Laurie

[\[1\]](#) As quoted in Katherine Keller, *On the Mystery*, 2008.

Synod Council Update

"It is with sadness that I announce the resignation of the Montana Synod treasurer Sue Ost who has served this synod faithfully and with great care in this position for over six years. Sue has decided that it is time for her to devote her energy to other things in her life, especially her grandchildren. Thank you, Sue, for all that you have given to the Montana Synod and the wider church. Your time, talents, gifts and skills have been greatly appreciated and we will miss you and your wisdom even as we send you forth with God's blessings.

At the same time, it is with excitement and gratitude that I announce the appointment of Dave Scholten, LPA as the interim treasurer of the Montana Synod. Dave is a member of Bethel Lutheran in Great Falls and has many years of experience in financial work and services. He will serve until June 2022 when the Synod Assembly will elect a new treasurer. A more thorough introduction to Dave will be coming in an upcoming Synod newsletter. Thank you, Dave, for your willingness to take on this important role in service to Christ's Church."

Save the Date for Synod Assembly!

The Synod Assembly will be held June 3-4 at the Billings Hotel and Convention Center. We will begin the morning of the 3rd and end late afternoon on the 4th. More details to come in the new year.

The Montana Synod Staff will be providing a recorded sermon following the lectionary for any interested, especially those

congregations currently without a pastor. Check the Synod website every Friday or the Vimeo playlist [here](#). These will be provided every week now through the end of the year.

Updates from Southern Africa

Dear friends,

This past week I attended the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA) Council meeting held in Johannesburg at the Lutheran center. Observing COVID-19 protocols, it was the first in-person meeting in more than a year and a half. LUCSA is the sub-regional expression of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Southern Africa, with 15 member churches in ten countries.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of LUCSA, which was established in 1991. The Council meeting opened with a worship service with Holy Communion, the induction of Council members and the installation of Rev. L.A. Kasper as the first female Executive Director of LUCSA. The theme of the conference, which was reflected upon in the Bible Studies, was "Listening Leadership."

The Council received reports from the Executive Director and Finance Department as well as program reports concerning the work carried out by the LUCSA Communion office and member churches in the region over the past year under very challenging conditions.

The reports highlighted HIV&AIDS, the Infohut project, Malaria, Gender Justice, Migrants, Refugees and internally displaced people, training of peace monitors and local resource mobilization, sustainable livelihoods and climate change, responses to COVID-19 including psycho-social support training, networking and resource development by Christian education coordinators, scholarships, the worship, liturgy and music project, and ongoing consultations regarding theological education in the region.



The ELCA is committed to accompanying LUCSA, companion churches and a number of ecumenical organizations as they faithfully engage in proclamation of the Gospel, mission outreach and work to mitigate the impact of poverty, HIV&AIDS, climate change, Gender-based violence, conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic in the communities they serve.

Thank you for your prayers, support and your participation in God's mission locally and globally.

Yours faithfully, Rev. Dr. Philip Knutson

ELCA Regional Representative - Southern Africa / Johannesburg, November 26, 2021

My blog page address is: <https://southernafricanconnections.wordpress.com/>

Please visit my [fundraising page](#). (Note: This fundraising page is set up for individuals' gifts only.)

If you are donating on behalf of a congregation or organization, please visit [ELCA.org/MissionaryGiving](https://www.elca.org/MissionaryGiving) for online giving.

Invitation to Vital Congregations Training for Leaders

Is your congregation ready to take some steps (even small steps) toward renewal or revitalization? Are you ready to try some new things, share some ideas, gain a greater understanding of the broader mission, bring clarity about your own congregation's mission, acquire knowledge on how to live that out in community, gain confidence to share what you have learned with the world, and find new allies from

within a cohort of congregations? Then, you are invited to attend the 2022 Spring Session of the ELCA Vital Congregations Re-BOOT Camp.

This is a fast paced co-creative and co-experimental RE-BOOT CAMP facilitated by leaders with steep experience in redeveloping congregations as well as added guest presenters from a variety of settings with a wealth of knowledge. These principles and more will be explored: focusing on Jesus and justice, being expectant of the Holy Spirit, living as disciples of Jesus, multiplying leaders who are young, diverse and bring fresh insights, and aligning with purpose and core values.

This will be a four-session training. The training sessions will be held two times per day from 1:30-3:00 p.m. (eastern time) and from 7:30-9:00 p.m. (eastern time) on January 13th, January 27th, February 3rd and February 17th. You may choose the best time each day that works for you. All sessions will be recorded and available to all registered participants. Pastors and congregations are encouraged to come as teams of 3-5 people for a time of inspiration, learning, planning, sharing, experimenting, visioning, and implementing. *NOTE: This training is for people who did NOT attend the Vital Congregations Re-BOOT Camp in 2021.*

For more information please contact your synod's DEM (Director for Evangelical Mission), or contact Neil Bullock at Neil.Bullock@elca.org (773) 380-2884 or Rev. Anna-Kari Johnson (773) 990-0814 Anna-Kari.Johnson@elca.org

All courses will be coordinated by DEM Rev Nancy Nyland, and team in partnership with the ELCA Christian Community and Leadership Congregational Vitality Team.

With our thanks and prayers for you all in Jesus Christ, Beautiful Savior,

Anna-Kari

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[Click here to download the Vital Congregations PowerPoint](#)

Masks are required in the Synod office and we ask that if you plan to come into the building for longer than a drop off, that you are vaccinated.

The Synod Office will be staffed, so please always feel free to contact us by phone or email.

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