



News of the Week January 12, 2022

Prayers of the Week

Please remember in your prayers this week:

For LPA Mike Conner and his family as they mourn the death of his wife, LPA Diane Conner.

From the Montana Synod Prayer Calendar:

Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Laurel
Joliet Lutheran Church, Joliet

West Virginia - Western Maryland Synod



Words from the Bishop: Thank you Farmers and Ranchers!

Dear Friends in Christ,

"We're going to bounce back. This isn't the first drought the farmers in our area have gone through and it won't be the last." This quote comes from Jill and Tyler, farmers in the Chester area, who appeared in a video called "Bone Dry: Farming across Montana in 2021." This [video](#) was produced by the Montana Wheat & Barley Committee, Montana Pulse Crops Committee, and Agristudios in an effort to lift up and celebrate the resilience of Montana farmers throughout the state.



I had a chance to watch this video before Christmas and was inspired by the stories of resilience I heard as well as the stories I've heard from some of our Lutheran ranchers and farmers across the synod. The year 2021 was an especially difficult year for our ranchers and farmers, many of whom faced wild-fires and intense heat and drought, unjust market conditions and socio-economic upheaval, grasshoppers and hay shortages. Making a decent living in agriculture always presents yearly uncertainties particularly for

the smaller producers of the crops and meat we count on to be on our tables every day at reasonable prices, and this year was harder than many. I know that many of you in your homes and congregations have suffered the consequences of this difficult year in ag.

And yet this video, which begins in the winter as farmers start to plan their planting process and carries us through the drought into the wild fire season, describes the courage and resiliency of the MT/NWY food producers who even in the midst of so many challenges, get up with the sun every morning, go out to the fields, barns or pastures and keep pushing through the hard times, moving forward in their vocation to participate with God in providing the food we eat.

What does this resilience look like in word and practice? In many of these farmers and ranchers I heard a calling, a deep sense of purpose to not only feed the world but to care for the land in the process. One farmer in the video described it as an “itch” he gets every December to get back out there into the fields. I’ve seen this “itch” in members of my own family and the congregations I served who would get up at 2:30 a.m. in -20 temps to help a cow birth her calf and then carry that calf into their homes to nurse it into survival. I would hear it in the words “we have hope for next year” expressed regardless of how the previous year went. And I would hear it in the promise that “we’re resilient, we’re adapting...and we’re in it for the long haul.”

I also have experienced farmers/ranchers resilience in the reframing of the struggle towards discovering something positive to focus on. For example, in the video, Jill and Tyler respond to the heat and drought that stunted their crops into very low yield product by stating, “We’ve got some product here, so that’s exciting; and we’re going to just keep working as hard as we can to get what we can off of it and continue to plan for next year.” Despite the frustration of putting the crop in the ground and having it “crushed in one month,” they still found the value in all that work for the future. “At least we have cover over our ground and at least we have something (nutrients) we’ll put back into the soil,” Jill said. And Tyler added, “Every drought brings its opportunity” such as market prices rebounding for next year, new contracts for the 2022 crop and the hope that Mother Nature will bring something different next year. (See minutes 14:30-18:45 for Jill and Tyler’s interview.)

I also see resilience in the adaptability of the ranchers and farmers, as they learn, grow, and innovate with healthier ways of doing their jobs. But finally I see this resilience in the willingness to help and care for one another in the midst of hardship, not just sitting with each other in the struggle but carrying each other through as much as they are able, even if its offering just one more day of water or a week of hay to feed the horses. (See [“Hay It Forward”](#))

I know that at some point even the most resilient farmer/rancher can lose hope and fall into despair. Just this week I saw a news story indicating that farmers and ranchers have the highest suicide rates of all occupations. And I’m guessing that there isn’t an agriculture-based community in Montana or N. Wyoming who hasn’t experienced the painful loss of one of its members to suicide. There are many reasons for these tragic circumstances, including minimal mental health care availability, the need to measure up to the rugged individualistic “I can do it alone” stereotype, and social stigma around the need to ask for help particularly when it comes to our emotional or mental health.

But the truth is that none of us are alone; we all need each other. Not only is God with us, strengthening us and shining the light of hope into our dark places, but also we who follow Christ are called to be God’s resilient, enduring people of faith who carry love, help, justice to those in need. It’s okay -- normal really -- to need help sometimes and it’s an act of courage and resilience to ask for that help when we need it. And for those of us who hear that cry, it’s a calling, Christ’s calling, to provide such help.

I think that we as Christians can learn a lot about resilience and hope and loving the neighbor from the farmers and ranchers who somehow find it within themselves to “come through it every year” and “hope for things to be better next year.” There is a reason Jesus used agricultural illustrations regularly to describe the kingdom of God. But I also think we can learn from those who have reached that place of despair and somehow, perhaps through a friend or pastor or another’s kind deed, find that spark of life within themselves to seek help. For that is all of us sometimes.

And if that is you right now, please reach out for support to a doctor, pastor, family member, friend, or hotline. For God loves you and wants you to be in the life God has created, Christ has saved and the Spirit has inspired for the long haul.

May God bless you all with Christ’s resilience!

Bishop Laurie

[Download the Bishop's letter for Annual Meetings here!](#)



Free Class for Pastors and Lay Leaders

Sponsored by the Montana Synod and NRIT.

We wanted to share this class with you as we continue to be physically and mentally impacted by COVID and other stressors. Please join us Jan 27th and Feb 3rd – one hour each day – for a Zoom we hope you'll find helpful. *Class will be recorded for those unable to attend.*

Trauma in our Bodies and Brains: What is trauma and how does it impact us? Join Dr. Betsy Stone to learn why your sleep is disrupted and your brain isn't functioning as it used to.

Thursday, January 27th from 10am to 11am.

Post-traumatic Growth: Not all trauma stops us in our tracks. Some of us actually grow from trauma. Learn about the arenas of posttraumatic growth, and think about how you might build them in yourselves, your families and your congregants.

Thursday, February 3rd from 10am to 11am.

Taught by Dr. Betsy Stone, a retired clinical psychologist who currently teaches as an adjunct lecturer at HUC-JIR, teaching pastoral and developmental topics in the School of Education.

Betsy consults on program development and community building. During the COVID-19 crisis, Betsy has led webinars on Trauma, Resilience and Post-Traumatic Growth for congregations, Rabbis, Hillels, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, The Jewish Teen Funders Network, Hebrew Union College and the Jewish Education Project.



Although this class is free, you will need to register in order to receive the link. [Go to the NRIT home page](#) on the synod website. Contact Jenny Kunka at j.kunka@nrit.org or 406-396-1398 with questions.

Christmas and Epiphany Devotions

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS:

The Christmas and Epiphany Season

Devotions for the Seasons of Christmas and Epiphany
written by rostered and lay leaders in the Montana Synod

~2021~



If you haven't already, make sure to download the devotions for this Christmas and Epiphany season. Available [here on the Montana Synod website](#).

**Are you streaming your service? We want to put together a list on our website of all the congregations in the Montana Synod that have their services online and available to the public. Please send any links to Colter in the Synod office,
cmccarty@montanasynod.org**

Keeping in Mind Global Mission in South Africa

Peru has the highest number of COVID deaths in proportion to its population. The impact of the pandemic is devastating, with 200,000 COVID deaths. With less than 33 million, the country has the highest COVID mortality rate globally: 6,072 deaths per million, as of January 2022.

By the beginning of 2022, almost everyone knows someone who has died of COVID. Experts attribute the disastrous pandemic situation in Peru to a combination of poverty, a collapsing national health system, and the emergence of new strains of the virus.

Poverty manifests itself in various ways in the context of COVID-19, from overcrowding in multi-generational housing, where 70% of the Peruvian workforce is in informal employment, forcing them to violate confinement or go hungry, and where medical care must be paid for and is unaffordable for most.

[Click here to read the full report from Gustavo Driau](#)

Synod Staff:

Bishop

Laurie Jungling: [**ljungling@montanasynod.org**](mailto:ljungling@montanasynod.org)

Associate to the Bishop

Pastor Jason Asselstine: [**jasselstine@montanasynod.org**](mailto:jasselstine@montanasynod.org)

Director for Evangelical Mission

Pastor Peggy Paugh Leuzinger: [**ppleuzinger@montanasynod.org**](mailto:ppleuzinger@montanasynod.org)

Director of Technology and Communications

Colter McCarty: [**cmccarty@montanasynod.org**](mailto:cmccarty@montanasynod.org)

Office Manager

Candi Standall: [**cstandall@montanasynod.org**](mailto:cstandall@montanasynod.org)

Director of NRIT

Jenny Kunka: [**j.kunka@nrit.org**](mailto:j.kunka@nrit.org)

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