



## Montana Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

### News of the Week January 27, 2021

### Prayers of the Week

**Please remember in your prayers this week:**

For Pastors Wenda Fry and Aprille Jordan and their families as they mourn the sudden death of Wenda's husband Mark.

For our companions in South Africa as they grieve the death of Bishop Manong's wife Joy.

For the family of Pastor Dave Monson, former pastor in Montana (1984-1992), who died last week in Washington.

**From the Montana Synod Prayer Calendar:**

Big Timber Lutheran Church, Big Timber

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Absarokee

Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and all staff of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



### Words from the Bishop: Condemnation

These days it seems that the church as well as the nation (and world) are caught up in never-ending spirals of condemnations. All we seem to hear is "Condemn them! Condemn that! If it's not perfect, we must condemn!" Even the calls for church leaders to condemn an action, group or individual have grown more vocal as we demand our judgmental viewpoints be echoed from someone who (supposedly) represents God.



What is this need to condemn and where does it come from? Why do we think judgment and condemnation against others is the answer to so many of our

problems? And why do we feel the need to demand that our leaders condemn those we want judged on our behalf?

The word “condemn” comes from the Latin word *con-damnare*. *Damnare*, the second half of that word, means to harm or damage; the *con* is there for emphasis. So to *con-damnare* someone means to really, really harm or damage them. (<https://www.etymonline.com/>)

Of course, we can all see the word “damn” in this Latin word which invokes images of God (or us) sending people to the horrible suffering of hell. And while sometimes we may have a lighter meaning in mind when we “condemn,” such as to disapprove or judge against, the weight of the word tends to imply the harsh desire to hurt or rip apart those we’re condemning.

This I think is one of the reasons behind our need to condemn: to lash out and harm others after being wounded. When we experience this hurt or remember past hurts while failing to remember the many hurts we’ve caused, we often are left with a strong craving to retaliate. We want to damage others the way we’ve been hurt through assaulting, dehumanizing, demonizing, and damning them, their identity group, their character, their actions and their personhood. And we especially like to do it on social media where we think there are no consequences to our actions.

We also seem to do this out of our own sense powerlessness and feeling out of control of our situation. We condemn in order to lift ourselves out of insecurity and a sense of weakness; in order to bully ourselves out of anxiety and fear; in order to tear others down and rip them apart so we can feel more self-righteous and more like god and thus all-mighty and power-full so that at least in the condemning moment that sense of human weakness and helplessness disappears...until it returns when those we’ve condemned attack us back.

And this steers us toward demanding that our leaders condemn others so that we can hear our own condemnations through their voices. We get stuck in echo chambers where we choose to hear only what we want to hear, and what we want to hear is our leaders confirm our opinions and echo back to us what we believe so that we can feel righteous in our own right-ness.

The fact is that all this condemning actually just perpetuates the cycle of destruction as the condemned get defensive and retaliate with more condemning words or actions. Then we retaliate with our own condemnations and so on, until we descend into violent, hate-filled damning of one another in a horror-show like the spectacle on January 6 or other violence, riots and wars seen throughout human history.

Here’s reality folks: condemning one another does not work! It doesn’t fix any of the problems we want to fix. It doesn’t allow us to be the solution we claim to want to be. It doesn’t cure the evils of the world. It doesn’t heal the wounds we want to heal or help those we are called to serve. Condemning only harms, destroys and damages, perpetuating the cycle of bitterness, cynicism and fear into on-going hate and finally eternal damnation.

So what do we as followers of Christ do? Do we stay silent in the face of the evil and suffering so obviously happening in the world around us? Do we ignore the pain and oppression, hate and violence against ourselves or the neighbors we are called to love and just suck it up as our “cross to bear”? Do we hide inside a comfy, nice-but-not-kind church in a false sense of safety until we get to escape to heaven?

No, of course not! But we don’t turn to condemning, which is God’s work and God’s alone -- IF God chooses to do so. God is God; we are not, and we are commanded to be on *God’s* side, rather than forcing God to be on our side, including the side of us that wants to condemn. (Cf. First and Second Commandment & Bp Elizabeth Eaton)

Instead, we exhort and challenge the “what is” by speaking and living God’s eternal Law of “what God wants,” namely Love, by being and doing Christ’s love in everything we do and say into the world through

kindness, compassion, peace, reconciliation, generosity, justice and self-control.

Instead, we admonish through the words of God's Law but always in humility, seeing and renouncing our own sin and complicity in the larger evils first by checking in the mirror and asking how our own words, actions, and ways of life may already be breaking God's Law, harming our neighbors and preventing Christ's kingdom from coming near. "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged." (Mt 7:1-5. See also Lk 6: 37-38 and Rm 2:1ff)

Instead, we proclaim through our actions and words the gospel of God's grace, forgiveness, welcome, and equal acceptance and love of all people of all identities, standing with the wounded in solidarity and lifting them up through the Spirit's encouragement, empowerment, and enlivening words, thoughts and actions.

And we proclaim this Gospel and Law not by tearing some people down to lift ourselves or others up, but by preaching over and over again the affirmative, positive gospel that we know through teachings and ministry of the Jesus of Nazareth in the Bible. (Thanks to Bishop Michael Curry for reminding us of this on the webinar that was recorded today entitled "Democracy and Faith Under Siege: Responding to Christian Nationalism" and can be [found here soon](#).)

So no, I will not condemn. Nobody but God has the power or right to condemn, including me. But I will speak and affirm God's Law AND Gospel loud and clear *ad nauseum* to those who would listen. For that is my call as a pastor. And I do this knowing that I too am in bondage to sin and cannot free myself, knowing that through faith that I too am a beloved child of God and created in God's image, knowing that I too am welcomed, loved and accepted through my baptism.

And SO ARE YOU a beloved child of God, created in God's image, welcomed, loved and accepted into Christ's kingdom! What amazing, grace-filled good news this is that we all get to share with the world! So let's stop condemning and instead lift up God's love for our neighbors in all we do and say.

In Christ's Love,

Bishop Laurie

### **Attention active and retired Rostered Leaders, and LPAs.**

Annual Reports to the Bishop often come due at this time but we are making changes on how these will be formatted and gathered.

Please watch for an email of what you need to do and how to submit these reports early next week.

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## **Montana Synod Council Profiles**

My name is Loni Taylor, Chippewa Cree from Rocky Boy, I am currently the Church Council President for Our Saviours Lutheran Church, here in Rocky Boy. I am a committee member for the ELCA Churchwide Council, and also sit on the Executive Board for Churchwide. I am also an A-EMT for the Rocky Boy Health Center for the last 14 years. I was recently/newly elected committee member for our Tribal Council in November.



I strictly volunteer my time at our church, I feel I am deeply rooted to our Church and work hard to keep it going for our community.

Amanda Liggett

I'm pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Roundup and Lavina Methodist and American Lutheran (a combined congregation) in Lavina. My most important job is chasing my sons around.

Having served for many years on the synod council, I have learned how creative this expression of our church can be. Decisions are made with care, always keeping in mind the people of our congregations and the mission we are called to as a church. We don't always have a lot of money to spend on the innovative ideas being fostered in our synod, but we do have inventive, resourceful, and faithful people at work on our behalf.



My time on the council is a continual reminder of something that should be obvious, but is easy to forget: as congregations and individual Christians, we are not alone. We are also not in competition with one another. Anywhere the Church on earth is healthy and thriving, all of us are strengthened.

**To: Congregational Treasurers and Presidents,**

Thank you for your faithful effort in sending Mission Support checks for the work of the Montana Synod and the ELCA. Just a reminder that the Fiscal year ends on Jan. 31, 2021. Your checks received by Feb. 1 will be credited to the 2020 fiscal year!

**ELCA Level 1 Coach Training**

The ELCA Coaching network has announced dates for Level 1 Coach Training for spring of '21. If you are interested in learning more about coach training, please check out the website: [elcacoaching.org](http://elcacoaching.org)

If you are interested in being trained, please contact Pastor Peggy Paugh Leuzinger, Director for Evangelical Mission, for more information.

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## Save the Date!

February 12th, 9:30am - Noon: **Bishop's Convo Lite**

More details to come via email!

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Dearest leaders in ministry,

We regret to inform you that, at this time, the Chico Pastoral Retreat has been postponed again this year. We, as a board, simply did not feel that the risk of in person meeting outweighed the gain of being with our colleagues after Easter.

That being said we are planning *something*. The Chico Planning Board will be offering some kind of get together the week after Easter. As of now it will be online, but it may be more re-connection and renewal than educational. We don't have details yet, but expect some things to be coming down the pike in the weeks to come.

Have a joyous season after Epiphany,

The Chico Planning Board

## PPP Round Two information:

The ELCA attorneys have prepared this synopsis on the Payment Protection Plan, Round 2

[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Paycheck\\_Protection\\_Program\\_FAQ.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Paycheck_Protection_Program_FAQ.pdf)

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## Winter Thursdays (and 1 Tuesday) with NRIT

### **Vital Congregations: What are they and how do they do it?**

Most people connected with a congregation wonder at some point how their congregation is doing and how it is and how it can be a center for God's mission. Doctors check "vital signs" as indicators of health or illness. What are the signs of life and health in congregations? This can be an anxiety producing question. We worry sometimes about "survival". We yearn and grieve for days that are past and wonder about what God is doing, could be doing in the days to come. And, then, there is the pandemic.... There are layers of grief to peel back. But there are also signs of hope and life and dare we even say, new life, in congregations today!

*Pastor Peggy Paugh Leuzinger, Director for Evangelical Mission in the Montana Synod will offer insight and perspective to engage the questions about signs of vitality and life in congregations and seek to open us up to focusing less on ourselves and our fears and more on what God is doing. We will hear about the Faithful Innovation process that will be opened for congregations in the Montana Synod to participate in so that your congregation can learn to listen to God, to one another and to your community.*

**Thursday, February 11 10am to Noon**

**2 Contact Hours**

**FREE**

**To register: [www.montanasynd.org](http://www.montanasynd.org) – Click on the “Faith Formation” tab, top of the page and click on NRIT. Scroll down to find these class.**

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## Montana Outdoor Ministries worship

Your Montana Lutheran Outdoor Ministries are excited to worship with you on Sunday, February 14th - Transfiguration Sunday! Together, Christikon and Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp will be sharing a full, virtual worship that we invite you to use for your Sunday Worship. The service will include music, the readings of the week and a sermon, communion (and the option to share our service without communion), and other elements of worship. It will be shared next week, but in the meantime, here is an order of worship to plan and prepare.

We thank you for your care and support of your camps. We hope you will join us for worship!

[Download the order of service here](#)

## Resources from MAC

We will be screening the film Purple on Thursday, February 4, at 6:30 pm, with a discussion to follow at 7:00. If folks are interested in attending, please e-mail me at [mac@mactmt.org](mailto:mac@mactmt.org). This will be a free event.

Thank you,

Gloria Soja



WE INVITE YOU TO A VIRTUAL SCREENING OF

# PURPLE

For more info, visit [www.resettingthetable.org](http://www.resettingthetable.org)

At a time of immense division, PURPLE tells the story of Americans with opposing viewpoints confronting their disagreements head-on and discovering the concerns and humanity that lie behind each other's positions.

A collaboration between Resetting the Table, a leading political mediation organization, and Landon Van Soest, an Emmy-award winning filmmaker, PURPLE presents a rare political conversation that uplifts, provokes, and inspires while going toward the heat of passionate political differences. Filmed in rural Wisconsin and Iowa – in a swing region within two bordering swing states – PURPLE models what healthy public debate on fault-line issues can look like.

In addition these downloads are available for all congregations:

[MAC, a prayer for Montana children, 2021 legislative session](#)

[Five Habits and prayer card 1](#)

[Five Habits and prayer card 2](#)

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Benefit Services | A Ministry of the ELCA

**Health is on the way:** If the holidays or the pandemic have you tipping the scales a little more these days, ELCA-Primary health plan members can utilize Omada, a **free** innovative digital program designed to help create modest changes that promote weight loss and help reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes and heart disease. Omada's specialized care programs offer eligible members individualized support to stay on track and maintain healthy habits. [Learn more about Omada on myPortico.](#)

**Getting started on your taxes early?** The Richard R. Hammar Clergy Tax Guide and the Federal Reporting Guide for Churches are both [available on myPortico](#) at no cost to you.

**Live Well, one small step at a time.** The tiniest things can combine to make a significant difference. This year, Portico invites you to check out [2021 Live Well](#). We'll guide you through activities that might seem simple, but can get you on the path to feeling stronger, balanced, and more resilient. Featured this month: 3 ingredients for a healthy breakfast, tracking how much you spend on food, and how to savor your meals mindfully.

Here are the links (above) if you'd like to embed them yourself:

Omada: <https://myportico.porticobenefits.org/benefits/chronic-condition-prevention>

Tax Reporting Resources: <https://myportico.porticobenefits.org/retirement-center/tax-planning-resources>

Live Well: <https://porticobenefits.org/live-well/>

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