



Montana Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

News of the Week February 17, 2021

Prayers of the Week

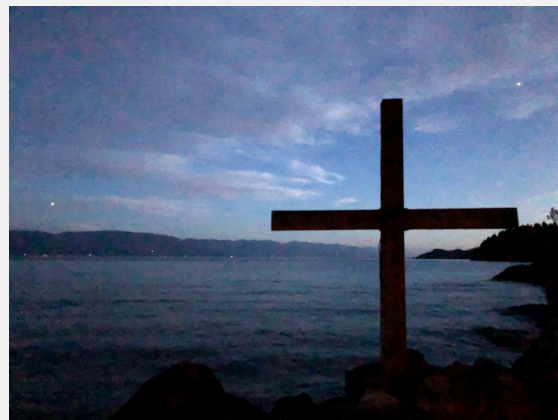
Please remember in your prayers this week:

For all those in the United States suffering through winter conditions that have caused power outages.

From the Montana Synod Prayer Calendar:

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Kalispell
Northridge Lutheran Church, Kalispell
Christ Lutheran Church, Libby

Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod
Caribbean Synod



Words from the Bishop: Return

“Return to the Lord, your God...” Joel 2:13

Ash Wednesday: the day of the church year (other than funerals and Good Friday) when we deliberately remember that we are finite creatures – dust and water molded together and created human by God. (Gen 2:7) “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return,” the words announce as ashes are rubbed on our foreheads.

Ash Wednesday is also the gateway into the trials and growing pains of Lent as we enter a wilderness of struggle and transformation into deeper faith. We often try to coax such transfiguring experiences out of Lent by giving something up or taking on a new discipline. Sometimes it helps; sometimes it falls flat.

I remember one year giving up chocolate for Lent only to get three boxes of Girl Scout Thin Mints delivered two weeks into the season. I suffered but didn't grow much in my faith besides learning to time my cookie buying more effectively.

“Return to the Lord, your God...” Perhaps this is what we ought to do for Lent this year: Return to God.



Leave behind the anger, hate, and injustice, let go of the fear, anxiety, and blaming and “Return to the Lord, your God.”

The prophet Joel describes what he believes “returning to God” means: “fasting, weeping, mourning, rending our hearts and calling a solemn assembly in which the preachers cry out in front of everyone, ‘spare your people, O God.’” Certainly we could do with some prayer-filled lamenting over God’s perceived absence during this past year of suffering.

David in Psalm 51 returns to God through a deep repentance for sins he committed. “Do not cast me from your presence and do not take your holy spirit from me,” he cries. “Instead create in me a clean heart.” We too, if we’re willing to take an honest look at our behaviors, could benefit from sincere confession in these days of division and violence, trusting in the joy of God’s salvation and forgiveness.

Or perhaps “returning to the Lord, our God” this year means simply doing what God asks the disciples to do during the transfiguration on the mountaintop: “**Listen to him!**” From the heavens, God proclaims, “This is *my* son, *my* beloved. Just listen to him.”

“Returning to God” is certainly about listening to God. An active, consistent, deep listening that doesn’t merely hear words on Sunday and then ignore them at the council meeting or in the grocery store. “Returning to God” is listening to Jesus’ call to love God with our whole self and loving our neighbors as ourselves. It’s listening to Jesus’ reminder to do unto others as we would have done unto ourselves. It’s listening as Jesus tells us he wants us to love our enemies and welcome those who are hungry, thirsty, stranger, unclothed, sick, in prison, or vulnerable and oppressed in some way. (Mt 25:31-46)

And then “returning to God” is doing it. If we are truly going to return to the Lord, our God, we must not only listen and understand; we are called to actually DO IT. Returning to God means following Christ’s call to love and serve in all we say, think and do.

Take for example the governor’s recent statement regarding “personal responsibility” as he removed the mask mandate. For followers of Christ, this does not mean doing what the culture says about personal responsibility by saying “I have the freedom to be responsible only for me and mine; others can take care of themselves.” That’s the self-indulgence Paul warns us against. (Gal 5:13)

Jesus teaches a different kind of “personal responsibility” that is centered on the neighbor, not the self. And it’s actually what we’ve been teaching all along – loving our neighbors. Being “personally responsible” is being responsive to our neighbors’ well-being and personhood. It means using our ability to respond by taking care of them, loving them and serving them even if we have to wear masks until Christ’s Second Coming!

The season of Lent is not about self-centered actions that pile up treasures for ourselves in this world. No season of the Church is about that, even Christmas. Lent is about returning to the Lord, your God, to listen to God...for God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

As we wander through the wilderness of Lent this year, let us return to follow Jesus Christ into the never-ending love and forgiving grace that God gives you and me on the cross. And let us return to the new and abundant life God gives in the “already, not yet” resurrection.

For though we may be dust, in Christ we are and shall be the resurrected dust of the universe, filled with the eternal life of Christ and God-beloved forever.

In Christ, Bishop Laurie

From Bishop Manong in the Cape Orange Diocese



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16 February 2021

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**To: ELCSA CHURCH-WIDE
ALL ELCSA DIOCESES
ALL CLERGY IN ELCSA COD
ALL COUNCILS IN ELCSA COD
ALL MEMBERS IN ELCSA COD
DIOCESAN PARTNERS**

RE: NOTE OF GRATITUDE

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

Allow me to greet you with the watch word of today (16/02/2021) as recorded in 1 Kings 8:60 "So that all the people of the earth may know the Lord is God and that there is no others."

Firstly, I herewith wish to express my profound gratitude for your prayers and supplications during our difficult time as a family.

From the time of the passing on of my dear wife and mother of my children, Joy Duduzile, who succumbed to Covid-19. Up to the time me and Bongiwe were hospitalized and subsequently discharged.

The whole family wish to thank you unreservedly for your kindness and the way you supported us.

Secondly a short update regarding myself:

As I was also found to be covid-19 positive I spend 15 days in hospital. As you will appreciate this disease attacks the respiratory organs. For the time I spend in hospital I had to learn to do basic physio, to learn to walk, to learn to breath and to learn to comprehend.

Today I am 10 days of 14 days in isolation at home. Except for the strain in my right calf that impedes my walking I am in good spirit under the Shadow of the Almighty.

Finally allow me to wish all of you a blessed Lenten period that begins tomorrow 17.02.2021

May you walk with Christ our Saviour as He prepares for our salvation. But do remember that Sundays are not part of lent. On Sundays we celebrate the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ of God.

May God richly bless you.

With kind regards I am

Your brother

+Motsamai

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C.C: Rev. A.T Khunou - DES
Rev. J.A Standaar - DET
All Diocesan
Offices of AGS

BISHOP MOTSAMAI ZACHARIAH MANONG

2021 Montana Synod Assembly Registration

The 2021 Montana Synod Assembly will be held as a virtual meeting
June 4-5.

Tutorials will be available to help voting members with participation.

[Click here for the registration link for the Synod assembly.](#)

Multiple voting members can be registered at the same time when you click on the form. Please note, there will be no physical registration or physical payment allowed this year. Please insure that each individual voting member has their own unique email address and has the ability to check it regularly.

There will be no visitor registrations this year, the assembly will be streamed on Youtube, so any non-voting individuals can watch there.

Registration will close April 15th.

If you have any questions about the registration process email:
cmccarty@montanasynod.org

Synod Council Spotlight: Dorris Tollefson

Hello, my name is Doris Tollefson, and I represent the Fort Peck cluster on the Synod Council. I am a retired elementary school teacher having taught for 30 years. As I neared retirement, I decided I wanted to grow more deeply in my faith and possibly serve my church, so I entered the LPA program. But a strange thing happened. I was asked to enter the TEEM program and discern ordination in the ELCA which I did. When I completed my studies, I was ordained and now serve the Saco and Hinsdale Lutheran Churches as their pastor. You never know where God's call will lead you.



I live in Hinsdale with my husband Jim. Living in a small town offers many opportunities to serve my community. I sit on the Hinsdale Cemetery Board and belong to the American Legion Auxiliary as well as to a teacher's organization Delta Kappa Gamma. I enjoy feeding and watching birds and chasing the squirrels that raid my bird feeders. I have six grandchildren whom I enjoy very much.

After attending Synod assemblies as a delegate and helping the council at those assemblies as a member of the SWO board, I had a basic idea of how the Synod council works. By serving on the council, I have learned that what the board does is more intricate and complex than I first realized. There are many small aspects with which the council deals that many people don't see on the outside. The decisions made by the council both the small ones and the big ones guide the Montana Synod in its direction. I have learned that I need to be prepared to answer to others about decisions the council has made. I have also learned that I am a liaison between the council and not only the congregations I serve but also the Fort Peck Cluster and the Montana Synod overall.

Whenever I can be with other faithful people, my faith grows and is strengthened. Hearing how people on the board live out their faith lives encourages me to be strong and bold in my faith life. I feel that it is important for people to listen to God's call to live out their faith lives. That call may be cheering up the next-door neighbor or being called to preach or serving on the council. We all need to heed God's call and serve in the church one way or another.

Pastor Anna Merritt



My name is Anna Merritt. I serve as Pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Great Falls, MT. I am a second career pastor, having served in North Carolina (my home state) for six years prior to moving to Montana in 2014.

It is a pleasure to serve on the Synod Council. I have found the experience valuable for learning about the diverse ministries and people across the vastness of our synod. I also appreciate the opportunity to serve

as a voice for the Russell Country Cluster. In my experience, Synod Council is one way to witness and participate in the varied expressions of the church as we come together to learn, grow, worship, make decisions and be.

LISTEN

Learn to hear and see what God is already up to in your church and community

Discover the unique story God wants to tell through your congregation

ACT

Try experiments and new actions to help learn what it means to be church in the 21st century--in YOUR context!

Enjoy the support of interactive workshops and ongoing coaching

SHARE

Pray, learn, and walk together with other Faithful Innovations congregations

Get ideas, inspiration, and tools for ministry!

NEXT UPCOMING TRAINING DATES TO BE HELD VIA ZOOM:

April 25, 2021

July, 2021

Oct. 2021

Each training will be 3-4 hours in length on a Sun. afternoon.

COST:

\$250 per congregation covers the costs of training sessions including materials as well as congregational coaching.

HAVE QUESTIONS? WANT MORE INFO? WANT TO SIGN UP? CONTACT:

Rev. Peggy Paugh Leuzinger
Director for Evangelical Mission

ppleuzinger@montanasynod.org
406.453.1461.



FAITHFUL INNOVATIONS

LISTEN. ACT. SHARE.

STRENGTHENING
CONGREGATIONS:
A PROCESS FOR THIS TIME
IN THE MONTANA SYNOD



In the twenty-first century, changes in culture and technology have led to widespread shifts in the world around us. And now in this time of Covid-19, there are more shifts that are occurring. All this affects our congregations, our communities and our people! This is the time to gather a small group of leaders to wonder how God is present and inviting your congregation to reflection and deep listening.

FAITHFUL INNOVATIONS

In this PROCESS you will LISTEN in order to discover what God is up to in your lives and neighborhoods and determine how you can join in! You will ACT through experiments within your contexts and then SHARE with others to discover what being church in the 21st century is all about!

WHO IS THIS FOR?

Any congregation that wants to learn to hear what God is doing in their community and world--and join in that work! It doesn't matter if you are a large or small congregation, have a pastor, are in transition or have another structure altogether. It doesn't matter if you are doing great financially or struggling, if your church has conflict or is in harmony. Faithful Innovations is for everyone!

PROCESS, NOT PROGRAM

Because the purpose of Faithful Innovations is to listen to how God is acting in your own context and to determine how you can join in God's work, results will differ in each setting! There is no magic, one-sized fits all answer for all the challenges of being church together, but recognize that every setting has its unique gifts and challenges. Outcomes will vary based on what God might be calling you to do!

DURING THIS PROCESS, YOUR CONGREGATIONAL TEAM WILL....

ENGAGE IN TRAININGS

As a team of 4-7 people, you will gather for three trainings over the course of 12 months with other committed congregational teams and discover together what faithful innovation looks like in each of our contexts.

RECEIVE COACHING

Each team will receive monthly coaching in order to plan initiatives and discuss outcomes and learnings!

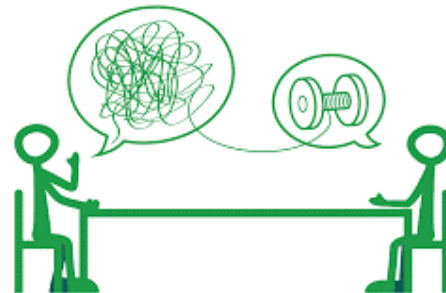
TRY EXPERIMENTS

Between trainings, congregational teams will lead their contexts in experiments designed and implemented by you in order to help you learn more about what God is doing in your midst--and how to join God's work!

[Download the brochure here](#)

Coach's Corner

In 2021,
still a time of Covid,
when we can **almost** see the end, but not yet...
it's easy to get discouraged, and feel out of sync.
Where are you now?
Where would you like to be?

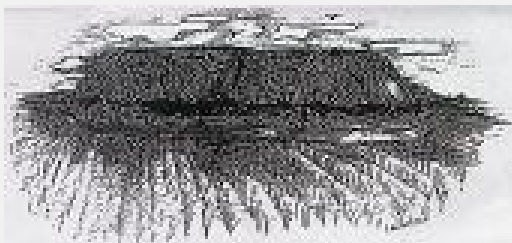


Coaching is built on the belief that you already have what you need to get started.

A coach can help you envision new outcomes, to create incremental steps to towards a new dream.

Get a coach and move forward!!

Check out the brochure at: [Coaching in the Montana Synod - Montana Synod ELCA](#)



**The William and Blanche Hetzel
Foundation, Inc.**

**P. O. Box 22276
Billings, MT 59104-2276**

2021 Grant Applications are now available on our website

www.hetzelfoundation.org

Application due date is March 15, 2021

If you have questions please contact Kerry at 406-656-1969 or email her at
hetzelfoundation@gmail.com

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