



News of the Week April 12, 2023

Prayers of the Week

Please remember in your prayers this week:

Prayers of healing for DEM Peggy Paugh-Leuzinger's mother Barbra.

Prayers of thanksgiving for the birth of Pr. Stacey Heggem's little girl, Eevie, on April 3.

From the Montana Synod Prayer Calendar:

Jocko Valley Lutheran Church, Arlee
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Missoula
Atonement Lutheran Church, Missoula

Eastern North Dakota Synod
Northwest Intermountain Synod



Words from the Synod: Reconciling Works for Congregations

When Pastor Molly Sasser-Goehner learned that Reconciling Works (RW) was coming to Missoula for a local training, she decided to send a team from Immanuel Lutheran Church. She thought that, at the least, the congregation could benefit from having conversations about intentionally welcoming the LGBTQIA+ community.

The in-person training was held during the fall of 2019 and a small group attended from Immanuel. They discovered that RW advocated an open process that provided flexibility for each congregation. Some teams might decide to move forward while others might find

that their congregation wasn't ready but could still benefit from open conversations.

Although COVID hit soon after the initial training, the team at Immanuel decided to continue the process, step by step using resources provided by RW.

From the Reconciling Works Website:

“Since 1983, the Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Program has been a public way for faith communities to see, name, celebrate, and advocate for people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions in the Lutheran church. The RIC Program is made up of congregations, synods, colleges, seminaries, outdoor ministries, and other Lutheran organizations.

Every ministry setting begins this journey from its own unique context and ReconcilingWorks is here to help you create an authentic welcome journey that is customized to your community.”

The RW Process at Immanuel Lutheran Church:

The most important pieces of the process were: team training, one-on-one conversations, public and open communication, education around Scripture, and prayer. These actions gave the team flexibility to respond to the specific needs and pace of the congregation, rather than an outside, imposed agenda.

First, Pastor Molly formed a team of 4-5 people to take the RW “Building an Inclusive Church” training and follow the process laid out in the “Toolkit” provided. The team then educated the council and received their consensus to move forward with the RW process. Next, the team publicly introduced themselves to the congregation and described their purpose. They invited people to have a one-on-one conversation with a team member and used every communication source such as worship, “temple talks”, email, bulletin announcements, and newsletters. At the same time, the team identified initial people to approach for a one-on-one conversation. These were people who might be supportive, including council members. These conversations determined the next steps and a timeline.

The purpose of the one-on-one conversations was to share each other's experiences and questions and to assess overall interest in moving toward an intentional welcome of the LGBTQIA+ community. Rather than persuade people to a particular viewpoint, these conversations were meant to share each other's stories overlapping with the LGBTQIA+ community. People shared the experiences of family members and friends who felt excluded from any church because of their orientation. Most members wanted LGBTQIA+ to participate in church, but some had questions about Scripture or doubts about marriage, leadership positions, and ordination. Others wondered how to talk to or interact with specific loved ones and what all the letters and terms meant. The conversations were respectful, deepened relationships, and held space for varying views.

In December 2020, the team invited the entire congregation to a forum sharing the ELCA story around LGBTQIA+ concerns and to clarify the 2009 churchwide assembly adoption of the social statement “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust.”

At this forum, the team shared an opportunity for Immanuel to host a seminary pastoral intern who happened to be queer and married. The attendees were excited and supportive. After council and congregational approval at the annual meeting, the intern started in the fall of 2021. Her leadership and clear gifts for ministry were key to continuing the conversation and opening the congregation up to an intentional welcome of LGBTQIA+ people. However, there were several beloved members who decided not to remain with the congregation.

In early 2021, retired pastor Jean Larson led discussions on Scripture to address verses often used to speak against the LGBTQIA+ community, and an overview of the entire Biblical witness's pattern of reaching out to the outcast, the foreigner, and the vulnerable. These presentations were well attended, recorded, and posted to the church website for anyone to watch.

In fall 2022, the team created a welcome statement specifically to include people of varying sexual orientations and gender identities. Another series of educational opportunities involved discussion about the welcome statement. Through a congregational survey, 95%

of respondents approved of the statement. The team members presented the statement at the January 2023 congregational annual meeting for a vote, and it was adopted unanimously.

Although Immanuel ended up creating a welcome statement, the team acknowledged that not every congregation will be ready to go through this process. Each congregation has their own context and calling.

However, simply going through the training and being available to have conversations around LGBTQIA+ concerns from a faith perspective was valuable to the congregation at Immanuel. The team met with members who wanted to be supportive of gay or lesbian loved ones, but didn't know how. They also met with people who were reluctant to ask their questions for fear of judgement about things they didn't understand or didn't agree with.

Almost four years later, Pastor Sasser Goehner said, "It's wonderful to be a pastor and see people who have family members and loved ones who are queer and to know that our congregation affirms them and loves them. I feel overwhelmed with joy that our congregation can say this. 'You are beloved. There doesn't need to be any shame or guilt or worry. You are a human being who has God-given gifts to share.'"

ELCA Farm Bill Listening Sessions

The U.S. Congress is working to draft a new, five-year Farm Bill. "You may already know Farm Bill reauthorization is underway," says John Johnson, ELCA Program Director for Domestic Policy. This impacts all of us who eat, including those of us who struggle with hunger. Beyond our bellies, we'll feel the impact of farm bill policy decisions through our vocations. "Many of you work on farms, in businesses, and help to feed hungry people not only in the United States but around the world," he observes.

What Is the Farm Bill and Why Now?

The farm bill is legislation that is critical to addressing hunger in the United States and globally. It covers federal nutrition programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), environment, trade, foreign aid and rural development. The bill impacts the lives of Lutherans and their communities – among us are farmers and ranchers and Indigenous communities and global partners and low income Americans. Congress is preparing to reauthorize the bill in 2023. Each reauthorization provides an opportunity to improve or expand programs that ensure access to fresh and healthy food while addressing root causes of hunger.

What Is a Listening Session?

ELCA farm bill listening sessions are virtual gatherings where ministry leaders, members of congregations, and those with valuable lived experiences gather our opinions and experiences informed by faith values on stewardship, justice and serving our neighbor. This input will equip one another and the many communities of this church for farm bill advocacy that reflects those values, including our ELCA Witness in Society advocacy staff. These viewpoints, opportunities, concerns and hopes for a future farm bill will inform ELCA advocacy and help shape the ultimate law that Congress passes.

When Are They Happening & How Can I Register?

At this time, three, 1.5 hour listening sessions are scheduled in April 2023. Register for any, but each session will feature some discussion specific to the region of a particular time zone.

- Eastern & Central Time Zone focus

- Tuesday, April 18 – 6 p.m. ET / 5 p.m. CT
- Register – <https://bit.ly/ELCAfarmbilllisteningEasternCentral>
- Pacific Time Zone focus
- Friday, April 21 – 12 noon PT [3 p.m. ET]
- Register – <https://bit.ly/ELCAfarmbilllisteningPacific>
- Mountain Time Zone focus
- Tuesday, April 25 – 6 p.m. MT (8 p.m. ET)
- Register – <https://bit.ly/ELCAfarmbilllisteningMountain>

[Click here to watch an introductory video](#)

Standing Up Against Hate:

An online Yom HaShoah panel discussion

Join MJP as we commemorate Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) and explore strategies for taking action against antisemitism and hate of all kinds

Monday, April 17th
7:00pm MDT
On Zoom

Dear friends,

We would love for you and your community to join us for our Yom HaShoah program on Monday, April 17th at 7:00pm MT on Zoom.

The program will include a Yom HaShoah commemoration, as well as discussion about responding to antisemitism today, personally and communally, and coalition-building. We will have four wonderful panelists: Rabbi Francine Roston of Glacier Jewish Community, Travis McAdam of Montana Human Rights Network, Isaac Nehring of Montana Youth Action, and an ADL Pacific Northwest Representative.

We'd be grateful if you shared the event information with your community either via newsletter, announcement at services, or forwarding the information to anyone who may be interested. You'll find a flyer attached, and the registration link [here](#).

Please let us know if you have any questions. We hope to see you on Zoom on Monday.

2023 Assembly Information

Registrations are now open!

A few things to remember before registering:

- Have all information needed to register beforehand including Name, email, physical address, and any meal requirements for each person registering.
- Carefully read all options available before registering, make sure to select the appropriate option for your registration.
- An individual email is required for each person.
- If prompted for a country code at the address portion of the registration, enter the number 1.
- All payments are online only.
- There will be **NO in person registration** at the assembly. All voting members **Must** be registered before the registration cut off date of May 11th.
- There is **no need** to print the tickets generated by Tithely. You will receive your registration packet in person at the assembly.

Click here to register for the 2023 Montana Synod Assembly!

After you register make sure that you have a room reserved at the [Heritage Inn](#) in Great Falls and ask for our discounted room rate for the Montana Synod Assembly.

If you would like to register for a display table, submit a video or annual report, or help sponsor part of the assembly [download the form here!](#)

Any questions about registration can be directed to: cmccarty@montanasynod.org.

Check the weekly e-news or our website, www.montanasynod.org for more information including nominations and resolutions and deadlines.

The deadline for both nominations and resolutions is April 15, 2023

Looking for Assembly help

We are looking for worship leader volunteers during the Montana Synod Assembly this year in Great Falls.

Positions include:

Musicians

Readers

Ushers

Communion Leader

[Click here to give to the Montana Synod](#)

Synod Staff:

Bishop

Laurie Jungling: ljungling@montanasynod.org

Associate to the Bishop

Brenda Frelsi: bfrelsi@montanasynod.org

Director for Evangelical Mission

Pastor Peggy Paugh Leuzinger: ppleuzinger@montanasynod.org

Director of Technology and Communications

Colter McCarty: cmccarty@montanasynod.org

Office Manager

Lori Jara: office@montanasynod.org

Director of NRIT

Jenny Kunka: j.kunka@nrit.org

[Click here to be taken to the newsletter archive on our website](#)



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