



## News of the Week June 21, 2023

# Prayers of the Week

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

**From the Montana Synod Prayer  
Calendar:**

American Lutheran Church, Harlem  
American Lutheran Church,  
Hogeland  
American Lutheran Church, Turner

Nebraska Synod



## Holy Closure: Leaving a Legacy of Mission and Ministry

Like living organisms, congregations have a life cycle: from birth to maturing to dying. In a world of change and challenges, there are congregations in the Montana Synod who are wondering about their future and if their congregation will close. These are painful and difficult questions.

Recently, my mother entered Hospice. She is nearing the end of her life (at 96). Now, although she feels quite good and is not actively dying, she is receiving care and support for what I am thinking will be the final chapter of her life. The gift of hospice is that it gives us, her family, the words and ways to care for her now and to be honest about what is coming – that she will die. We are not in control of when, but we know that it will happen. There is a freedom and gift in facing the truth and then living into each day to savor and live with fullness. The gift of hospice is that we can focus on living now, prepared to face the eventual death of my mom.

Some congregations in the Synod (and all around the church) are more actively dying than others. The word hospice is used in some of these circumstances. The honest conversations about the closing of a congregation allow those who are a part of the congregation to grieve

openly, and to make plans for the end to come, not with dread but in hope that we are people who believe in new life and that we are gifted to trust that God's promise of new life comes out of death.

There are resources and guides for congregations to access to begin (or continue) the conversation about how to close a congregation and to leave a legacy. The Montana Synod staff desire to walk with you in your discernment and encourage you to engage in courageous conversations about the future of your congregation, whether that is in faithfully making the decision to close or to engage in some process of renewal. There are strong emotions that people feel about the reality of being part of a declining congregation. Grief and loss, losing the stability and comfort of a congregation, and shame and fear of failure, wondering how the congregation got to this point. If your congregation is asking these questions, please know that you are not alone. There are many explanations for why congregations are facing the possibility of closure: shifts in the culture around us, changing demographics in rural communities and in our towns and cities.

The question is how we honestly and openly address these realities. I first heard about "holy closure" several years ago. I've seen and heard about congregations making the hard decision to close, based on facts and trends, not with a sense of shame, but with a hopeful view of the future and God's grace and mercy that brings new life even out of what appears to be ashes. Some congregations have sold their building and been able to make significant gifts to support Synod and churchwide ministries as well as other Lutheran and local ministries that allow the congregation's legacy to be passed on.

First English Lutheran in Great Falls is in the process of closing and gifting their building to Helping Hands ministry that has been involved in feeding the hungry in the community and which has expanded their ministry in significant ways in the last three years. With the use of the building dedicated to the ministry, the leadership is looking into how they can expand the ministry in the future to share Gospel love with those who are in need. Some congregations have discerned that their building is a burden and that upkeep and repairs hinder the people from being engaged in ministry in their community, so they have sold or given their building away and have gathered as people of God in another space to focus on a ministry of outreach and care.

Leaders in congregations: there are resources to assist you as you engage in discerning the future of your congregation. Please contact the Synod Office for a list of resources and to consult with Bishop Laurie, Pastor Brenda or me about engaging in a conversation about Holy Closure.

May God's grace and peace sustain you,

Pastor Peggy Paugh Leuzinger

Director for Evangelical Mission  
Montana Synod

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## Faithful Innovation Sampler

**Sunday, June 25, 2023**

**2:00 – 4:00 PM Mountain Time on Zoom**

Get a taste of what Faithful Innovation Learning Communities are all about! Join Faithful Innovation Learning practitioners from several Synods across the ELCA for a Question & Answer time and to sample training exercises.

What is the Faithful Innovation process? Contact Pastor Peggy Paugh Leuzinger, Director for Evangelical Mission to find out more details about this introduction to the Faithful Innovation process.

**Register here: <https://forms.gle/WvFQ23R5T4br9LZT8>**

**All participants are asked to register by Sat. June 24<sup>th</sup>. You will receive an email with the Zoom link upon registration.**

Schedule:

2:00-2:45 Welcome, Introductions, Dwelling in the Word

2:45-2:50 Intro to listening practices “Share a story of a time when you were most spiritually engaged and energized in your local church.”

2:50-3:05 Breakout Groups

3:05-3:15 Report back

3:15-3:45 Panel discussion with 3 – 4 Faithful Innovation teams

What did they learn?

What are they doing now? (how has the practice of listen—act—reflect become part of their life together?)

3:45-4:00 Time for questions



## Centennial Anniversary

*-from Pastor Jayson Nicholson*

This last weekend Our Savior's in Laurel celebrated 100 years of ministry. We first want to thank God and everyone who made this celebration possible, from those who heard God's call 100 years ago, to those who sustained the ministry, to those who joined us this last weekend. There were people who came from at least six different states to celebrate 100 years of participating in God's ministry including an entire confirmation class. A great time was had celebrating 100 years of faithful people responding to God's call.

In preparing for this celebration there was an ambitious research project to connect those present with those of the past. We heard stories of faithful ministry that started over 100 years ago before Our Savior's was chartered, we heard stories of the journey through several buildings and renovations, but mostly we heard stories of faithful people doing the best they could to respond to God's call in their particular context. As we heard these stories one consistent theme kept arising, and that is how different the ministry of Our Savior's has looked over the years nor do we know what it will look like in another 100 years.



Those who founded Our Savior's 100 years ago could never have imagined what ministry looks like today, and yet faithful ministry is still happening because God is active and present in our community. Today we cannot imagine what ministry will look like in 100 years, but we can be certain that God will still be active in our communities and faithful ministry will continue.

To God be the glory today, tomorrow, and forevermore!

## ELCA Vital Congregational Training: Part 1

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 2023 Summer Session of the ELCA Vital Congregations Training, Part 1.

This is a fast paced co-creative and co-experimental Training 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; engaging the neighborhood/community; 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 11:30-1:00 p.m. and from 5:30-7:00 p.m. on Thursdays -- June 29<sup>th</sup>, July 13<sup>th</sup>, and July 27<sup>th</sup>. 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 have not attended an ELCA Vital Congregations Training or who would like a refresher before attending the Fall 2023 Part 2 Training.*

Contact DEM Peggy Paugh Leuzinger for further information or with questions.

ELCA Vital Congregations Training Summer Session 2023 Registration Link Part 1:  
[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScHS-JfizcuBJ6x63EbF-L7SKa1G3t9-21HeV1Z7Kqu7oM9-w/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScHS-JfizcuBJ6x63EbF-L7SKa1G3t9-21HeV1Z7Kqu7oM9-w/viewform?usp=sf_link)

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## Sermon Manuscripts Available

Montana Synod leaders have been providing manuscripts for use in congregations through the Lent and Easter seasons. We are happy to announce that these manuscripts will be provided throughout the entire year! Thank you to the leaders in the Montana Synod who are providing these manuscripts every week. They can be found and downloaded on the [Montana Synod website here](#).

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

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