



News of the Week September 13, 2023

Prayers of the Week

Please remember in your prayers this week:

For Pastor Ron and Marian Paulson as they leave Montana to be closer to family in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

For the Montana Synod Council as they meet this weekend in Great Falls to do the work of the Synod.

From the Montana Synod Prayer Calendar:

Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Broadus
American Lutheran Church, Baker

Northwestern Minnesota Synod
Ecumenical Partner, Community Presbyterian Church, Jordan



Spotlight on the Synod: Serving on the Frontier

-By Pastor Doris Tollefson
[Originally published in the Faith+Lead blog](#)

One must be an adept driver (and comfortable with vast open spaces) to lead Easter people

“Oh, the Lord is good to me and so I thank the Lord for giving me the things I need like the sun and the

*rain and the apple seed. Oh, the Lord is good to me.
Amen. Amen. Amen.”*

Children, gathered around their cookies and juice at Sunday School (or in my case at Wednesday School) sing this meal blessing with gusto. I too sing this song with gusto as I look out over God’s creation in the frontier in which I live and serve.



What is “frontier”?

Frontier? Do I live in a part of the country that borders on another country? Well, I could say yes to that since Canada is only about 50 miles away from where I live. Do I live in the unsettled part of our country, like the way we think of the Old West? Well, no, because modern amenities and conveniences are available, although they are not at my fingertips. A trip to town, whether 50 miles or 120 miles, means stocking up on necessities. [What is the frontier today?](#) I live and serve in an area that is not completely considered or understood by the majority. I live and serve in a very rural and very remote part of the United States populated by few people who chose to live and eke out a living here. There are more cows per square acre than people! And we are forgotten by the majority.

I live in northeastern Montana, and the two small churches I serve are part of the Montana/Northern Wyoming Synod. Most people, when hearing or thinking about this vast state of Montana, think of the mountains in the western part of the state. You can certainly see the wonders of God’s creation in the mountains and lakes and forests, and the more urban areas of our state are located there. But two thirds of the state is covered by an immense stretch of plains dotted with small towns and communities. It’s a unique landscape filled with hills, buttes, river valleys, fertile soil, and in places with a moonscape type of topography.

Unique ministry

Just as this part of the country is unique, so is ministry here, and often this ministry resembles the ministry of circuit riders in the Old West frontier days. I fully realized this when I took my most recent boundaries training class which was offered through zoom for people serving in the Rocky Mountain region. My fellow classmates were mostly pastors serving in large urban areas, and I looked forward to learning about their contexts. But what I came away with is that the people in my class could not grasp my context.

Yes, they understood “rural,” but the remote part was an alien thought to them. This became evident in a breakout session when someone commented that a pastor should not live in the same neighborhood as their congregants and should not engage in outside social activities with the people whom they serve. I tried to explain that there was no way I could do that because of the very remote area in which I serve. If I miss the home basketball game, my absence is noted. Before I could more fully explain the remoteness of my context, the breakout session ended. But the conversation brought home the point that very few in the wider church don’t consider or fully understand this kind of ministry.

Blessings of driving

Many pastors in the eastern part of Montana serve two or more points in a parish, separated by long stretches of highway, paved or gravel. Among those with whom I serve, I consider myself fortunate because I only drive 13 miles between the two churches I serve, while some drive 50 miles or more to serve in small congregations separated by miles. Driving is vital to the context of frontier ministry. Not only do I drive 26 miles each Sunday, but also a drive to a cluster meeting is a 45-mile one-way trip and driving for Bishop’s convocation or Synod Assembly is a 250-mile one-way journey. Just as the circuit rider was a skilled horse rider, we frontier ministers are adept drivers. A blessing of these short and long drives is to reflect on a conversation or my reading or refine my weekly sermon or to consider a situation that has come before me. An added blessing is to see God’s creation stream by as I drive—the crops, grass, trees, and shrubs as the seasons change as well as the deer and antelope, and the birds.

Easter people

So, why do I feel blessed to serve on the frontier? It's because of the people who live here. The people who live here are true Easter people. They have the hope of what the future will bring. They put a seed in the ground with the hope that it will grow and produce fruit. But if the rains don't come and the crop isn't what was expected, thanks for God's blessings still comes from their hearts and mouths. They feel blessing in both the scarcity and abundance they experience in their daily lives. They thank the Lord for the sun and the rain and the apple seed as well as the dry times, the grasshoppers, and the poor grain prices. They work and live with the hope of what the future will bring, and that hope transfers to the faith they have in God and his promise of eternal life. And I am blessed to serve people with such an awesome hope.

Important ministry is happening in our rural congregations and we see so much possibility in the collaborations occurring around Montana! NRIT is providing a time for lifting up the beauty of small congregational ministry and for imagining a future of hope as we seek to support the work of our rural congregations.

Consider attending or sending a lay leader to our Montana Rural Ministry retreat. Scholarships for the hotel stay are available.

Montana Rural Ministry: Hope and Possibility

Believing that the future of rural ministry is ecumenical and also knowing that there are hopeful possibilities for rural ministry in Montana, we'd like to invite both pastors and lay people to this ecumenical gathering as a time to ask questions and envision the future.

1pm Wednesday, Oct. 11 through noon Thursday, Oct 12
St. John's Lutheran, Great Falls

Cost: \$25 and supper Wednesday night is provided. Participants need to find their own lodging for Wednesday evening.

[Register Here](#)

Bishop's Convocation Save the Date!

The Bishop's Convo will be held on October 24th, 10am - 3pm in four locations!

We are trying something new this year in order to provide **an in person** opportunity to gather while accounting for our vast territory. These sites will be linked via Zoom with a Synod staff member at each location to facilitate so we can convene with all of our pastoral leaders simultaneously together across the Montana & Northern Wyoming Synod!

In person locations will be:

Pella Lutheran, Sidney, MT
First Lutheran, Glasgow, MT
Immanuel Lutheran, Missoula, MT
Big Timber Lutheran, Big Timber, MT

Make sure to plan ahead for where you'd like to attend and look for registration information in an email coming later in September

GENEROSITY 101: PRACTICAL STEPS FOR CONGREGATIONS WEBINAR: OCT. 2, 2023 6:30 – 7:30 PM



On Monday, October 1, 2023, from 6:30 – 7:30 pm, Congregational Stewardship Committees, Congregational Council leaders, Pastors and LPAs are invited to join in a Zoom webinar with Rev. Tim Brown, (the speaker at the 2023 Synod Assembly) and Director for Evangelical Mission in the Montana Synod, Rev. Peggy Paugh Leuzinger.

This will be a time to learn and discuss practical steps for congregations to align values and mission around stewardship in congregations. We will consider generosity through the lens of abundance, rather than scarcity. There will be time for questions with the leaders at the end of the session for those who would like to remain on the Zoom.

Please register for the webinar using the link below, in order to receive the Zoom invite link.

A Second Session with Rev. Brown and Rev. Leuzinger is also scheduled for Mon. Dec. 4, 2023 again from 6:30 – 7:30 to discuss “What can we do now?” as your congregation approaches the end of the fiscal year. There will be suggestions and conversation about how to “make the ask”.

[Click Here to Register](#)

2024 ELCA Youth Gathering
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the table Young Adult Gathering

September 15, the day when registrations begins for the 2024 Youth Gathering, is approaching quickly!

As the Synod coordinator, my task is to see if you have any questions and also to make plans for any congregations that wish to travel to New Orleans together. With this in mind, I will host a zoom on Sept. 12 at 7 pm for one person in each congregation that is planning to take part. This will help me know who is planning to attend and also to give you some information regarding registration and the flow of the gathering. We can also choose a hotel for all of us so that the youth in our synod can be housed close together and actually get to know each other. [Please let me know](#) if you are able to attend the meeting and I will send you the link directly. I hope to see you on Sept. 12!

Blessings,
Pastor Brenda

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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