



Moments for Mission

Southwestern Washington Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ by empowering congregations and church leaders to grow in worship, education, outreach, stewardship and other ministries.
 May 2020

Staff

Bishop Richard E. Jaech

Rev. Rebecca Shjerven
bishop's associate

Rev. Melanie Wallschlaeger
director for evangelical mission (ELCA staff)

Allison Ramsey
office manager

Address
 420 121st St. S
 Tacoma, WA 98444

E-mail
swsynod@plu.edu

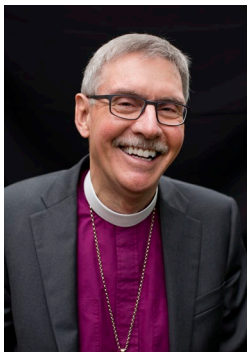
Website
www.lutheranssw.org
www.elca.org

Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/South-western-Washington-Synod/1290477871337786>

Twitter
 @SWWASynod

We Are on a Journey Together

by Bishop Richard Jaech, Synod Bishop



Dear Friends,

So many of the key stories in the Bible are stories of God's people on a journey in which they pass through difficult experiences and strange settings until they arrive at a new place, both physically and spiritually: Abraham and Sarah, called by God from their homeland in Ur to a new country. The children of Israel, leaving slavery in Egypt and making their Exodus journey to the promised land.

The people of Judah in southern Israel, forced to travel to Babylon and back in the time of the Exile. Jesus and the disciples, walking the dusty highways of Galilee as they traveled south through Samaria to Jerusalem. In every case the journey involved trusting God and following God's calling into the unknown. In each journey, the travelers were stretched, challenged and finally transformed.

We are on such a journey now. Physically we are staying at home and hardly going anywhere. Most of us wish we could get out more. However, emotionally and spiritually, each new day takes us to a new place of questions, realizations, and challenges. It often feels like we are walking through a strange and constantly shifting world. We wonder where we are going and what will become of us.

In the story of the Exodus, God wanted to assure the Israelites that God was always with them. Therefore, God accompanied them as a visible pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Whenever the Israelites set up their camp for an extended stay in a new location, they would pitch a large, specially designed tent in which they placed the Ark of the Covenant and other holy objects. They called this tent the Tent of Meeting and also called it the Tabernacle. When Moses needed to talk to God, Moses would enter the Tent of Meeting and the cloud of God's presence would come and stand at the entrance to the Tent and the two would talk.

Most ancient peoples, including often the Israelites, pictured God dwelling on a high, remote mountain peak. Yet, on their pivotal Exodus journey from captivity to new life, God was never far or remote from them. Each day, God travelled with them and, at each stopping point, God pitched a tent next to theirs. St. John remembers this in the first chapter of his Gospel when he wrote about the coming of Jesus and said, "The Word became flesh and pitched a tent among us."

Continued next page

We are on a journey together, continued from page 1

I do not have easy explanations or predictions about our current journey and how we will make our way through the dangers of disease, unemployment, and world unrest. However, I do draw strength from God's abiding presence and the companionship of those with whom I make the journey, namely all of you. Although it may feel very lonely as we shelter in our own individual tent/house, I know that God walks with us, fills us and surrounds us. As St. Paul said when he journeyed to Athens, God is the One "in whom we live and move and have our being,"(Acts 17:28) and, as he said to the Romans, "there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus."(Romans 8:38-39)

Along with God's constant presence, we have each other. A friend recently reminded me that "every road, no matter how difficult, travels easier when we have friends walking it with us." Thank you for walking this road together! All of you in the Southwestern Washington Synod are wonderful examples of love as you care for each other in your congregations, help your neighbors in your communities, and find countless new ways to gather electronically for worship, study, and fellowship. Like the people of Israel and the disciples of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is strengthening all of us to journey with hope and trust. As the Holden Prayer expresses it:

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God bless you in this challenging time and may these weeks be for us a journey to new life and transformation.

In Christ,

Bishop Rick Jaech

A little encouragement from Martin Luther (when the plague hit Germany)

"I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me, and I have done what he has expected of me, and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above..." - Martin Luther, 1527 "May One Flee From a Deadly Plague."

Congregations in Transition - May 2020

Lord, we pray for your wisdom, insight and peace for the congregations and the leaders in our synod who are working through a time of pastoral transition. We give you thanks for each and every one. Amen.

Congregations	Position	Status	Pastoral Care
Bethel, Brush Prairie	P	P	Vera McEwan
Christ, Federal Way	P	TR	Pr. Mark Peterson
Lutheran Church of Christ the King, Tacoma	P	TR	Pr. Linda Milks
Vinland, Poulsbo	P	I	Pr. Mike Hanson
Zion, Camas	P	TR	Assoc Pr. Susan Dollinger

Mobility position key
P – Pastor
AP – Associate Pastor
D- Deacon

Mobility status key:
NV – New Vacancy TR –
Transition
I – Interviewing
C – Calling

Synod Calls

Vera McEwan has been called by the Synod Council to serve as Interim Pastor at **Bethel Lutheran Church, Brush Prairie**. She has been appointed as a Synodically Authorized Minister.

Mary Shaima, Synodically Authorized Minister at **Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Stevenson**, will be ordained into this position as Minister of Word and Sacrament when we are able to hold public gatherings again.

Retirements:

Pastor Coe Hutchison will retire from his call as Pastor of Grace Lutheran, Port Townsend effective June 1, 2020. Coe will be moving to the Northwest Washington Synod after retirement.

Contracts

Pastor Alan Berg will serve Grace Lutheran as Interim Pastor beginning in June.

On The Cyberspace Road with the Bishop

With the rest of the Synod Staff, I am working out of my home and limiting my road trips. Therefore, I do not have photographs to show you of the congregations and people I have visited this past month.

However, my work schedule and the schedule of all the Synod Staff members has been very full each week, with lots of Zoom visits and meetings. Here is a summary of my activities around the Synod in April.

- Weekly Zoom meeting with pastors and deacons

continued next page



Cyberspace Road with the Bishop, continued from page 3

- Weekly Zoom meetings with the bishops of Region I
- Weekly Zoom meeting with all ELCA bishops
- Live stream Lenten Reflection and Conversation services on Wednesdays, produced with the help of Jonathan McClung

Continued next page

Cyberspace Road with the Bishop, continued from page 3

- Two Zoom meeting with the Youth and Young Adult Ministers in our Synod
- Easter Guest Preacher (pre-recorded) at First Lutheran, Poulsbo
- With Pastor Rebecca Shjerven and Pastor Melanie Wallschlaeger, provided a recorded Sunday service and sermons for the second week of Easter and provided recorded sermons for the third week of Easter
- With Synod Treasurer, Bob Yost, provided two information meetings for congregation Treasurers and Pastors regarding applying for CARES Act federal assistance

All of the Synod Staff members were equally busy with activities this past month, including: PSALM students check-in; Affordable Housing Team meetings; Hunger/Feeding Ministries; Phone calls and Zoom meetings with all pastors and deacons in Synod; meetings with congregations in a call process; meetings with Prison Ministry staff and board members; Media Technology meetings regarding converting our Regional Education Meetings into online events.

I am thankful that we have been able to continue our ministry effectively during this time in the same way that all of you in your congregations have creatively and effectively continued your ministries. Thank you for your prayers, ministry and Mission Support as we work together as a Synod!

The Synod website has a long page of resources for congregations and rostered leaders during COVID-19 <https://lutheranssw.org/covid-19-related-resources>

Synod Online Educational Workshops

Since we had to cancel our in-person Synod Educational Gatherings, we will now offer five of the workshops online. Each will have a presentation, time for Q & A during the event, and a follow-up session at a later date, if class desires.



After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

You may register for as many of these free online workshops as you'd like- just click on the link at the bottom of each workshop description for a simple registration form:

LGBTQIA Beautiful Plus: Conversations Around Becoming an RIC Synod

Saturday, May 16th at 10-11:30am



Enter a conversation and learn from members of the Synod's RIC Task Force about "Reconciling in Christ"- What it means, why it's important, and why this Synod is exploring the possibility. Small Group Discussions and large group presentations.

Facilitators: Members of the Synod RIC Task Force, including Rev. Megan Filer, MaryAnn Nelson, Erin Burk

****Register for RIC Synod Workshop** (*registration link will be ready on May 1st*)

Building Community Partnerships while Maintaining your Tax-Exempt Status

Tuesday, May 19th at 6-7:30pm



Get informed about the types of building rentals and how to engage them in shared ministry partnerships. How can you recognize partnerships through building usage arrangements? This workshop will cover non-partnership private event rental and facility usage rules while still maintaining your tax-exempt status. Plus, cell phone tower leases, the two types of tax-exempt statuses, plus how your facility usage may impact both federal and state business tax-exemption, and state and local property tax-exemption.

Presenter: Phil Edlund, Certified Church Administrator serving at Mountain View Lutheran in Edgewood and Chapter President of The Church Network (national admin networking group)

****Register for Building Community Partnerships and Tax-Exempt Status**

Workshop **HERE** https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_rs7hlgijScSNnwtUFT5FfA

More workshops next page

Synod Online Educational Workshops, continued from page 5

Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church

Saturday, May 30th at 10-11:30am



Churches are both shrinking and aging as more young people disengage. Based on groundbreaking research with over 250 of the nation's leading congregations, Growing Young provides a strategy any church can use to involve and retain young people. It profiles innovative churches engaging 15-to-29 year olds that are growing spiritually, emotionally, missionally, and numerically. Packed with ideas, Growing Young shows ministry leaders how to position their churches to reach younger generations in a way that breathes life into the whole church. This workshop will explore the Six Essential Strategies and talk about how your congregation can use these as part of your ministry. **Time for online Q & A. Follow-up will be a Growing Young Book Group to continue this work, if desired.**

Presenters: Deacon Ingelaurie Lisher, Synod Youth Committee Chair, serving at St Mark's Lutheran Church by the Narrows, Tacoma and Terri Hekroth, Director of Youth Ministries at Creator Lutheran, Bonney Lake.

****Register in advance for Growing Young Workshop [HERE](#)**

https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_LKYyefSEQmSyfqwMvDHX9A

Top 3 Things You Can Do on Social Media to Build Community -

Wednesday, June 3rd at 6-7:30pm



Learn about three things that you can easily do in your congregation using social media to grow community.

Presenter: Cort Okfen, webmaster for St Marks Lutheran Church by the Narrows, Tacoma, owner of most followed twitter handle in S. Tacoma, and owner of Okfen & Associates, an internet marketing company.

****Register for Social Media Workshop [HERE](#)**

https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_3k-dNwiJSxecEv5iArieoA

Compassionate Integrity

Saturday, June 6th 10-11:30am



Have you ever wondered how you could cultivate the compassion called for in the Charter or help others cultivate that compassion? compassionate Integrity Training (CIT) is a great place to start!

Through this interactive workshop meeting, you'll learn about how this program, which Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Port Angeles, has implemented, is a resiliency-informed program
Text and registration continued next page

Compassionate Integrity Workshop Continued from page 6

that cultivates human values as skills, so we can thrive as individuals, and a society within a healthy environment. By learning skills to calm our bodies and mind, becoming more emotionally aware, learning to practice compassion for ourselves

and others, as well as engaging with compassion in complex systems, we can build towards compassionate integrity: the ability to live one's life in accordance with one's values with a recognition of common humanity, our basic orientation to kindness and reciprocity.

Presenter: Pastor Kristin-Luana Baumann, Holy Trinity Lutheran, Port Angeles, Compassionate Integrity Training Facilitator.

****Register for Compassionate Integrity Workshop [Here](#)**

<http://events.constantcontact.com/register/event?llr=magpsifab&oeidk=a07eh237y5s871bcee0>



Purple mosaic cross used in the image on page 5 was created by the Mosaic Ministry Group at Stella Lutheran Chapel in Longview, WA with Pastor Jill Ross.

One Synod ALYVE Board Member graduates this year!



Name: Miranda Morgan
Church: Creator Lutheran
School: Sumner High School and Pierce Community College
Years on the ALYVE Board: 4
What I'm most looking forward to in the Fall: Going to Western next year, I feel I'm most excited for the amazing opportunities that Bellingham will bring me not only as a student but as a person as well. One of my biggest values in my life is to always learn and to

explore new places that God has created, and moving to Bellingham will allow me to do that.

Congratulations to Miranda Morgan for graduating from high school, even though she won't get a traditional graduation ceremony this year. We want to wish Miranda much peace and joy as she transitions to a life at Western Washington University. They'll be blessed to have you! *Continued next page*

ALYVE Board continued from page 7

The Synod ALYVE Board (Association of Lutheran Youth in Various Endeavors) is a Synod-wide group of High School students who represent the 88 congregations of the Southwestern Washington Synod of the ELCA. They gather on a monthly basis in a common mission to bring the youth of our area closer to God and to each other to plan projects that involve youth in activities that promote unity of faith among the Youth in Western Washington.

Each Lutheran church in the SWWA Synod is encouraged to send one or two students to the annual ALYVE board Convocation where officers are elected and projects are planned. These young board members work hard and give countless hours to serving the larger church.

Kirsten Larsen (Beautiful Savior, Vancouver - youthdirector@beautifulsaviorlutheran.com) and Shannon Fleischfesser (Pilgrim, Puyallup- shannon@pilgrimpuyallup.org) are co-adult advisors to the ALYVE Board. The boards' goals are to visit churches and foster relationships between church youth groups, plan a weekend retreat for Jr. and Sr. High students to learn about the amazing love of Christ, plan a fun night out for 8th-12 graders in the spring, to encourage friendships beyond our own neighborhoods, try to involve more youth in church related activities, and to come up with inexpensive ways to connect youth to God and one another.

ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission Return to Home Countries

Update from Central Europe Country Coordinator, Rev. Rachel Eskesen and husband, Rev. Zach Courter. Pastor Eskesen is on this synod's clergy roster.

Zach:

I wanted to write you just a quick update on how your missionaries in Central Europe are doing. Rachel, Dorothy and I are still in Budapest, Hungary, where we will shelter in place until it is no longer required. Overall, we find ourselves healthy and well, for which we give thanks to God.

Throughout the past few weeks, there have been hours that have felt like days, days that have felt like weeks, and weeks that have felt like months. While the past few weeks have brought a lot of changes to the way we live our lives, it has also brought significant changes to our ministry as well. In Mid-March the decision was made for all YAGM volunteers across the globe to return to their homes in the United States. This was a really hard, but necessary decision. This allowed our young adult missionaries to return and begin to brace

themselves for the reality of a pandemic in their home country. It also allowed our partners in ministry to better focus on their commitments to keeping their communities as safe as possible in these trying times. *continued next page*

Young Adults in Global Mission continued from page 8

Though we are confident that ending the YAGM service year early was the right thing to do, it has still left us grieving the lost time with friends and colleagues, as well as the community experiences that were awaiting each of our missionaries and the whole YAGM, *continued from page 5*

Young Adults in Global Mission continued from page 8

cohort in the Spring and Summer. We are also acutely aware that the losses we have already felt may prove to be quite small compared to what awaits us in the days and weeks to come.

WHAT ABOUT HOME ASSIGNMENT?

That's right, we were planning to visit you all (as many people and churches as possible) this Spring and Summer. We're currently in the midst of re-imagining what that might look like during this time when we're not able to travel. I'll be in touch with other ideas for how we can share in one-another's presence *virtually* in the weeks and months ahead.

HOW TO SERVE AS A MISSIONARY DURING A PANDEMIC?

We define accompaniment as walking together in a solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality. When I pictured the ways we would be called to accompany our community this year, I must admit I did not think of practicing solidarity with them through a pandemic. And yet, by socially distancing, following city curfews, washing our hands, covering our coughs/sneezes and sheltering in place, we are putting into practice the love of neighbor that Jesus speaks about. It is a love that protects the most vulnerable in our communities, as well as ourselves. Simply put, I believe following these practices are one of the most powerful ways we can live out the gospel right now.

NOW THAT THE YAGM ARE BACK HOME, WHAT ARE YOU UP TO?

First, we're reminding ourselves to take some deep breaths, relax, and remember that we're not just "working from home," but we're surviving a pandemic while managing to get some work done too. It's easy for both me and Rachel to stay busy—beyond just caring for Dorothy! Rachel continues to learn and grow in her responsibilities as the ELCA's Desk Director for Europe (Nothing quite like a global pandemic to cut your teeth). We are caring for the YAGM missionaries who have returned home, and I am preparing to meet the 2020-2021 YAGM candidates as we get ready to hold the "digital version" of our Discernment, Interview and Placement event in mid-April. All of the interviews and presentations will take place online instead of in person as planned.

Affordable Housing Task Force Work

Rev. Dr. Melanie Wallschlaeger, Synod Dir for Evangelical Mission

The synod's Affordable Housing Task Force has convened twice during the "sheltering in place" order and will do so again, before quarantining ends. We have identified three ways congregations can participate in the synod's Affordable Housing initiative:

- 1) **Provide congregational property specs.** This month, we will receive initial input from a development team on the 8 sets of congregational specs we submitted in April. This first pass at congregational properties will provide us with information from the perspectives of zoning, local rents, potential site layouts, and any potential roadblocks. Two members of the Affordable Housing Team will be calling synod congregations to encourage participation in this initial information gathering stage. Submission of congregational property specs does not obligate a congregation to be a site for affordable housing; but can start the conversation and discernment process should a congregation feel called to explore affordable housing as part of its mission and ministry.
- 2) **Consider using parsonage for affordable housing effort.** The Affordable Housing Task Force is committed to congregational partnerships in this effort, regardless of a congregation's size or physical plant. A few congregations have unused parsonages that are occasionally used for rent, rather than as part of the pastor's compensation package. If your congregation would like to participate in an affordable housing effort, a parsonage is a viable way to get involved.
- 3) **Connect folks who might have passion for volunteering in "wrap around service" effort.** Congregational partners in affordable housing typically make some effort to have ministry that is relevant to folks who live in the congregational housing development. Possibilities for ministry include family ministry, mentoring ministry, childcare or English as a Second Language services. Congregations can engage in the synod's affordable housing effort through passionate and interested volunteers.

Please prayerfully consider whether your congregation could be a partner in affordable housing. To find out more, please contact melanie.wallschlaeger@elca.org or 253-225-9721.

ELCA Domestic Hunger Grant Applications now open

Does your church have a program that helps alleviate poverty and/or hunger? Consider applying for an ELCA Domestic Hunger Grant. These grants can provide up to \$10,000.00 a year for three years for your organization/congregation program. The deadline for applications is June 1, 2020; however, you do have to register to apply, and it can take up to FIVE DAYS for your registration to be accepted. You can start by going to <https://www.elca.org/domestichungergrants>.

Hunger Ministry Resources next page

Hunger Ministry Resources:

Summer is coming; we know that things have been up in the air, but hopefully you are still making plans for Vacation Bible School. <https://www.elca.org/Resources/ELCA-World-Hunger#HungerEd>

Curriculum can be expensive. And in a time when all of our finances have gotten tight, that may be a real worry for your congregation. But ELCA Hunger has three FREE VBS programs you can use:

- **God's Good Creation:** Together, we will learn about the many ways that God's creation works together for the benefit of all.
- **Who is My Neighbor:** Together, we will learn about some of the people around the world who are our neighbors in the kingdom of God.
- **On Earth as it is in Heaven:** Together, we will be learning about the Lord's Prayer and how God is using us to bring God's vision to life in the world. <https://bit.ly/2SdaaPX>

These resources are all free, and include five days of VBS lessons, handouts, etc, which you can order online, or download them directly from their website.

Not doing VBS? Or maybe you already purchased your VBS materials (Great planning ahead!) then consider adapting these materials for online learning or Sunday School.

And while you are there, remember, there are resources that you can use YEAR ROUND, and they are free. Take time to explore the various learning.

How can you help NOW:

- Food banks have been slammed; the need has gone way up—but the resources are down, as food drives have been cancelled. If you are able, donate either food, or money to your local food bank.
- It isn't always about food. Sometimes it is about isolation and loneliness. Think of the members of your church who are most at risk, and send a note or make a call!
- Food drives are not the only thing that have been cancelled: many blood drives have also been cancelled. Many blood banks are desperate for donations. Call your local blood bank and set up an appointment to donate blood.

The ELCA Federal Credit Union can be a Paycheck Protection Program resource for your congregation or ministry

With newly enacted legislation providing additional funding for the Paycheck Protection Program, the Mission Investment Fund has the opportunity to cooperate with our financial partner, the ELCA Federal Credit Union, in offering these loans.

The ELCA Federal Credit Union (ELCA FCU) is now a Small Business Administration-certified
continued next page

ELCA Federal Credit Union, continued from page 11

lender that can offer loans to congregations and ministries through the Paycheck Protection Program. These loans can keep your congregation or ministry afloat by covering staff members' pay and other operating expenses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

MIF and the Credit Union have been working closely to provide special assistance to our customers and members during this global health crisis.

For application information and access to details about the program and the latest updates, visit the special [Paycheck Protection Program page](#) on the Credit Union's website.

Also visit MIF's website, www.mif.elca.org, to see the types of relief available to congregations, ministries and individuals.

ELCA Social Statement Draft: “For baptized Christians, civic engagement is a vital means of discipleship”

The idea of government was already very much in focus because this was an election year, and the pandemic has focused it more so. But what does the ELCA teach about the nature and function of government in relation to God's purposes? What is a faithful Lutheran response regarding citizenship and civic engagement?

To help guide our church on these questions, the 2019 Churchwide Assembly asked for the preparation of a social message. At this time, the message is in draft form. Through May 27, you are invited to provide feedback on how to strengthen the message.

I invite you to click [here](#) to read “A Draft Social Message on Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in a Democracy.” To offer feedback, please fill out the [survey](#). You may also choose to email comments to draftsocialmessage@elca.org. The comment period ends May 27. To learn more about what social messages are, click www.elca.org/socialmessages.

In light of the feedback, the message will be revised and presented to the ELCA Church Council for a vote in June. Upon its adoption, the message and a study guide will be released over the summer, along with a Spanish translation.

<https://community.elca.org/emailviewonwebpage.aspx?erid=9360898c-5815-4fc5-b5d9-22d6bb2da523&trid=9360898c-5815-4fc5-b5d9-22d6bb2da523>

Successes in the 2020 Legislative Session

Your advocacy and support during the 2020 legislative session made significant, tangible changes for our neighbors and the environment in Washington state. Below is a snapshot of the bills that were either on our legislative agenda or on our support list, and we celebrate their passage. Thank you for promoting social justice and racial equity across our region! Download FAN's [2020 Legislative Successes](#).



New First Third of Life Ministry Resources Available Online

Sparks now has eight free downloadable Sunday school lessons at <https://bit.ly/3eZcun6>

Are you looking for ways to support faith formation at home? Sparkhouse is excited to announce **Family Sunday School**, a free 8-week lesson series for families!

Each week Sunday school curriculum developer (and former summer camp Arts and Crafts director) Dr. Dawn Rundman and her family will host Family Sunday School. Each episode presents a lesson based on Lectionary readings that families can watch together. The Bible story, illustrations, and other content are based on **Spark: Activate Faith Lectionary** Sunday school lessons.

You are welcome to distribute, post, and reproduce the lesson materials for your church families in whatever way works for you. A new lesson will be posted every Tuesday for the following Sunday. Lessons will be posted through Trinity Sunday, June 7, 2020. The first two lessons are available now.

The Synod website has a long page of resources for congregations and rostered leaders during COVID-19 <https://lutheranssw.org/covid-19-related-resources>

PLTS PrayerSpace

Thursdays, beginning April 16, 2020

4:00 to 5:00 pm Pacific Time

Facebook Event: <https://www.facebook.com/events/310283013285030/>

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://clu.zoom.us/j/813292266>

PLTS PrayerSpace, a new venture by the Office of Seminary Relations, is an open invitation, weekly Zoom meeting to gather those who wish to pray virtually with others. The basis for the establishment of this new PrayerSpace is Jesus' command, "Seek and you shall find." We believe that distance of those praying from one another or from the objects of their prayers is not an obstacle for God. We have confidence in God's desire to heal. Participants will be able to bring their own prayer concerns to the group while also praying the concerns of others. The experience is envisioned to be similar to the laying on of hands, done over the internet. PrayerSpace will be moderated by staff and faculty of PLTS, under the leadership of Pastor Brian Stein-Webber. Prayer concerns may involve individuals, groups, movements or the whole global community of life. You are invited to simply show up in PrayerSpace and/or send in your prayer requests to pray@plts.edu. Prayers received each week by 2 pm on Thursdays will be prayed that day in our PrayerSpace.

If you have questions, you may contact Pastor Brian Stein-Webber at bsteinwebber@plts.edu.

Keep the Problem the Problem

Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner, Living Compass Wellness Initiative

I have shared the story I am about to share in this column once or twice previously because living through it taught me a valuable lesson. I'm also sharing it now believe its lesson is especially applicable to the situation many of us find ourselves in today, sheltering in place for what has been more than a month now.

My wife and I love to spend time in the wilderness, as we love the quiet and spiritual nourishment, we receive by being in nature. So several years ago, we were canoeing in Quetico Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada, a very remote park that is only accessible by canoe. I remember well an experience we had one stormy day. We had awoken early and had to decide whether it was safe to spend the day on the water, as a storm was predicted later in the day. I thought we should stay put where we were sheltered on shore. She thought it made sense to take off and try to get to the next lake a mile or so away before the storm arrived. After a brief discussion, we decided to take off, hoping for the best.

Continued next page

Keep the Problem, continued from page 14

We loaded up the canoe with all our packs and took off across the vast lake we had been camping on. A half-hour later, we were in the middle of the lake, and a strong thunderstorm suddenly arose. Fifteen minutes from the closest shore, we glanced behind us and noticed that the storm had come up quicker than we expected. In the next few minutes, we became uncomfortably aware that the sky was becoming black, the wind was whipping around us, and the temperature was dropping. Soon there was lightning in the distance, and we both knew the last place we wanted to be at that moment was sitting in a canoe in the middle of that large body of water. We were scared.

So what did we do? We did what any two people would do in such a situation. We began to have a fight right there in the middle of the lake. The argument started when I started to raise my voice over the wind, yelling, "I told you there was a chance of a storm and that we shouldn't come out here today!" (Note to self: saying "I told you so" never helps resolve anything). Soon the shouting went back and forth, with her asking and directing, "Why aren't you paddling harder? Don't paddle on the left, paddle on the right!" And then we began to disagree about which point on the horizon was our desired destination. After a few minutes of futile arguing, we looked at each other and realized how silly we were being. We took a deep breath, double-checked the map, and resumed paddling.

When we finally reached shore and could later talk about what happened, we realized that out on the water, we had not really been mad at each other, but instead, the approaching storm had scared us both so much that we had begun to turn against each other. The storm was the "problem," and yet in the midst of our anxiety, we had temporarily made each other the "problem."

Whenever people find themselves in the midst of a "storm," they are vulnerable to turning against one another, rather than turning toward one another for support and cooperation. The world is currently in the midst of a "storm" like we have never experienced. If you are sheltering in place with others, you may find that you are getting on each other's nerves, becoming more irritable, and even fighting. You might find yourself lashing out at state and national leaders. You might hear yourself sounding like my wife, and I did that day on the lake, yelling such things as, "I told you so. You are not paddling hard enough. Why do I always have to do all the work around here? Nobody appreciates how hard I'm working."

All people are vulnerable to turning against one another when experiencing fear in the midst of uncertainty. Today this includes couples, families, friends, businesses, work teams, politicians, and organizations. Every one of us has experienced some degree of loss and disruption, some much more than others, and some have suffered losses so severe they wonder how they will ever recover.

Whenever I work with a family or organization that is in conflict, I almost always, at some
continued next page

Keep the Problem, continued from page 15

point, share the mantra, "Keep the problem the problem, and don't make a person the problem." Because when we begin to think that the other person the problem, not only do we injure the relationship with that person, but we also stop focusing on the real problem. When my wife and I were so busy yelling at each other, neither one was paddling; neither one of us was addressing the real problem ahead of us, the storm that was surrounding us, and our need to get off the lake.

We are all now in the midst of a big storm, and we are going to be paddling together through it for what looks to be a long time. I, for one, will try to remember to keep my focus on the problem and not make others the problem. Even more, I will remember that others are an essential part of the solution, as the African proverb reminds us: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

But just as soon as I commit to not blaming others, I realize how hard it can be to put this into practice. Because seriously, "Why am I the only one around here who EVER unloads the dishwasher?!"

Congregation News

The Rock- Living Stones Prison Congregation newsletter- Spring 2020

<https://lutheranssw.org/wp-content/uploads/Living-Stones-New-Aprin-2020.pdf> Learn about how the men at the **Washington Correction Center in Shelton** are dealing with the COVID-19 Stay Home, Stay Healthy orders and no access to their pastor and what YOU can do to help make their world a little brighter. //