



South Dakota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

October 2020 Newsletter Inserts

From the Bishop's Desk

Siblings in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! – I hope you had, and still have, time to soak up those last few warm days before the cold weather once again will have a grip on us. For many congregations during this time of the year, budget planning is on the agenda, as well as reminders to committees and auxiliaries to begin their work on their reports that soon will be inserted in the congregation's annual report. And you know what annual reports mean? They mean that there will be an annual meeting of the congregation coming up in January. All of the sudden you stop and begin to ponder and wonder, how you could possibly have an annual meeting if we are discouraged to meet? Once you locate a dusty copy of your constitution somewhere you never thought it would hide, you begin to read about options for the congregation to hold a regular meeting. Soon you come to find out that if you want everyone who would like to attend, you would need to allow for other options than in person gatherings ideally in a digital way from the safety and warmth of their home.

Voila! Your wish may just come true if you and your congregation's leadership are willing to invest a little bit of time and elbow grease. The secretary of the synod, the synod's legal counsel, Pastor Renee Splichal Larson, and I have developed everything you need to include the Constitutional provision 10.08 into your congregation's constitution. Yes, you will need to meet in person to adopt this provision, but you still have time to gather in person outside while we have a few warm late summer days. Your rostered minister, pastor or deacon, or your SAM and your congregation's president should have received an email, as well as a letter, with everything you need to make the inclusion of provision C10.08 possible.

This provision will allow your congregation to hold congregational meetings in a digital format. We also hosted an online one-hour workshop, which outlined the process step by step, and answered questions participants had. On a side note, implementing 10.08 will have you ready to go for any congregational meeting from here on out, even if it is not the annual meeting. For instance, it could be a meeting about replacing your broken boiler in the middle of February or the shingling of the leaky church roof. I hope you get my point. You want to move on implementing 10.08 into your constitution now, while you still can meet in person

outside so that in the future you have options on hand when you either cannot meet in person due to weather or another crisis. More information on this provision can be found at sdsynod.org/constitutions. As always, contact me with questions or concerns. I am here to accompany you in your joys and challenges of ministry.

God's peace and substance be with you,
Constanze Hagmaier, Bishop

Re-Formed and Re-Shaped

Rev. Jonathan Steiner

At the end of October, we will once again celebrate the Reformation. Centuries ago, Martin Luther led the movement to change how the church works. One major factor was that the church had made poor decisions in the midst of a pandemic, the Bubonic Plague. The church had made choices that strayed from the Gospel, and Martin Luther called them out on it. Through disagreements, violence, and schisms, the church was re-formed into something new.

Yet God was with them. The Gospel did not fail. It even grew more clear, and led to resurrection out of the death of the old.

Now that we are in our own pandemic, we have been reshaped once again. A new reformation is taking place around us, but also through us and our decisions. We will continue to be confronted with tough situations. We will find ourselves disagreeing with each other. We have already seen violence and brokenness.

Yet God is with us. The Gospel will not fail. This is our time to cling to the Gospel, to proclaim the love of Christ that will not go away.

This is an opportunity to invite people to find the peace and comfort of God's promises as the world around us shifts under our feet. Our call as Christians is to go into the mess of the world, and share the promise that God is with us. The Holy Spirit gives us the strength to do these things, and unites us with our neighbors to change the world, building a little bit of God's kingdom here and now.

We are being reformed. It is not easy. But God is still at work. Peace be with you!

Called to Love and Serve

Rev. Renee Splichal Larson

You may not know this, but I read all of the newsletters that come into the Synod office. I get to read great devotions written by pastors, deacons, synod authorized ministers, and council presidents. I see noisy offerings to support ministry and local non-profits. I see participation

in caring for our neighbors around the world through Lutheran World Relief. I see creative new ideas for Christian education for all ages (“take out” Vacation Bible School is just one example). I notice idea after idea of how “God’s Work Our Hands” will be lived out in communities across our Synod during a global pandemic. People are worshipping in new ways via parking lots, computers, or separated by tape. Ministry is happening, my siblings in Christ, even and especially in this strange time.

Know what else I have seen in your newsletters? I see called pastors and deacons and church elected leaders doing the very best they can to make decisions that will preserve lives and sustain each congregation’s ministry. No matter what decisions are made, not everyone will be happy. My sister-in-law, who happens to be a physician, said to me, “Five years from now we will know what we should have done.” Nonetheless, there are decisions that have to be made in these days and they are far from easy. For sake of the Gospel, extend grace to your rostered ministers, your elected leaders, and one another.

As followers of Jesus, we are to model and live out what it means to be called into a community of faith that practices forgiveness and reconciliation daily. It is hard work to “live among God’s faithful people!” We are set apart to be different. We are to not let the divisiveness that currently plagues our country and world divide the body of Christ, of which we are all baptized into. We are knit together by Jesus, who is greater than political allegiances, and yes, even a pandemic.

We are to love and trust God above all else, and love our neighbors as ourselves. This is the faith we live out each and every day no matter what is going on in and around us. Some wisdom for us from Proverbs 3.5: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

Free OnDemand Psychological First Aid Training

In partnership with LSS, we’ve put together a free 30 minute training to provide you some resources to use to support our neighbors through difficult times. You can view the training online on the Synod’s YouTube channel and website (YouTube.com/sdsynod or sdsynod.org/PFA).

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an evidence-informed approach that is built on the concept of human resilience. PFA aims to reduce stress symptoms and assist in a healthy recovery following a traumatic event, natural disaster, public health emergency, or even a personal crisis. We encourage you to attend and share this information widely!

Stories of Faith in Action 2020-2021

You can now view the latest edition of “Stories of Faith in Action” digitally livinglutheran.org/StoriesofFaith/. This annual publication illustrates how God is at work across the ELCA through your generosity. It highlights how a portion of your offering, called Mission Support, advances the ministry of our church — particularly the ways the ELCA nurtures vital congregations, raises up leaders and grows the global church. Most importantly, it’s one way we say thank you for your faithful generosity to your congregation, your synod and the churchwide organization — by showing your offering at work.

Dear Abby

Dear Abby:

My accountant told me there’s no need to save my charitable gift receipts, because she won’t use them anyway. Something about the government increasing the standard deduction and no more filing a Schedule A with my tax return. Is there still a way for me to support my church and save on taxes?

*Sincerely,
Jen Arcocity*

Dear Jen,

Yes! For many of us, giving from the checkbook is the least tax-efficient way to be generous. One way to save on taxes is to give appreciated shares of stock, bonds or mutual funds. While you’d be stuck paying capital gains taxes if you sold those shares and then wrote a check, your church (or any other non-profit organization) can sell the stock without paying any taxes at all. If you still want to own that investment, you can buy the shares back the same day and increase your cost basis. More great news—when you work through Lutheran Planned Giving of South Dakota, no fees or commissions are deducted from your gift.

Thank you for making a difference, Jen. If you’d like to know more about charitable stock gifts or other ideas about how to give outside your bank account, call or email Kathy McHenry, (605) 274-5030 or kmchenry@sdsynod.org.

Blessings always,
Abby

NOTE: Please consult your legal and tax professionals for information specific to your situation.