



South Dakota Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.



Dear Siblings in Christ of the South Dakota Synod,

Grace and peace to you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!

“But we had hoped” – is probably the most used phrase of 2020. However, this is also the phrase of the two disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus after Christ’s death and resurrection. While on the road wrestling with things

that they cannot understand, Jesus joins them on the road, sharing with them how all of these things rested in God all along. It is not until the breaking of the bread that the holy heartburn the two disciples felt all along propels them to run back to their friends to share that Christ truly is alive and not dead, and that therefore his followers need to live into the promise that they too are alive and that death has lost its power.

I cannot help but come to understand that this story is our story. It has always been our story, but 2020 has brought this story alive for me in new and profound ways. We too have found ourselves saying countless times this year, “but we had hoped.” We too wrestled with the hard questions about what to make of the events of this past year as they unfolded in our life. We have wished many times to go “back to normal.” As I heard from people, I invited them to expound on what going back to normal means to them. Creating this space allowed for a deeper reflection on who we are as people of God in South Dakota. Jesus accompanied the disciples on the road and shared scripture with them to open their eyes to God’s continued provision and presence in the world. Even in the midst of these life-altering and events of Christ’s death and resurrection God is alive and at work. My staff and I have accompanied your community of faith during this life-altering pandemic assuring you that God’s Holy Spirit is inspiring and sustaining.

Early on, we hosted weekly Zoom meetings for rostered and lay leaders. We continue these meetings on a monthly basis. Task forces were created to provide resources and training for congregations to continue ministry, such as “Canvas” an online resource platform and network for everything educational. Two worship documents and guidance were created: “Extending the Table, Expanding Participation” and “Come Let us Worship in a New Way.” I can say that the pandemic and the challenges of living into a new way of being church has created some heartburn. Many may not call it a holy heartburn, but remember neither did the disciples until they sat at the table with Jesus and ate. Only when bread was broken, and wine was poured, did they remember the promises that God’s got them and that they have nothing to fear. I pray that you too will come to recognize and interpret your heartburn as *holy heartburn* that empowers you to be church in a new and different way for the sake of the Gospel.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership. Now, as we move forward, let’s commit ourselves to journey together in Christ, and in Christ alone.

C. Hagmaier

Journeying with you in Christ,
Rev. Constanze Hagmaier
Bishop of the South Dakota Synod, ELCA

