



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

## **August 2020 Newsletter Inserts**

*Congregations of the South Dakota Synod are invited to use any of the following newsletter inserts for their regular newsletter schedules. These short articles are written by members of the staff and our partners in ministry.*

### **From the Bishop's Desk**

Dear sibling in Christ of the SD Synod,

Grace and peace to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! As we relish late summer, we are also reminded in various ways that colder temperatures are on its way. Usually that means we begin to settle in and look forward to fall and winter activities. This year will be different for us. Some of us, like my family, received already communication from the school district that the school year may look different than a year ago. For some this causes anxiety.

Uncertainty is challenging. Even though I have never been a Boy Scout, I embrace the concept of always being prepared. It helps me to manage my anxiety, when I feel it coming on. I would like to use this opportunity to share with you how your synod staff prepares for the colder season ahead and how you in your ministry setting can prepare for Fall and Winter.

Realizing that many long to be back to in person worship, especially when temperatures begin to drop and outdoor worship is no longer a viable option, a task force prepared a contactless liturgy for congregational use. You can access the document by following the link at [sdsynod.org/covid19](https://sdsynod.org/covid19) under Worship Resources. Feel free to use it for Fall and Winter worship planning in your ministry setting. Please know that even though it is contactless, my primary recommendation is to not hold in-person worship. However, if your congregation is meeting in person, I continue to recommend wearing masks and maintaining at least 6-foot distance between non-household units. All other recommended and known preventive measures to prevent spreading the virus from one person to another are also recommended to be practiced.

These are trying times for all of us. Let us remember to be kind with each other, to create safe spaces where we respect and honor each other's needs and to model to

the world around us that God's people are able to work together for the sake of community. As always, feel free to reach out to me with questions, concerns or if you would like me to join you and your leadership in discernment conversations of what God's up to in your community.

In Christ,  
*Rev. Constanze Hagmaier*  
*Bishop of the SD Synod*

### **Focus on Discipleship**

*Rev. Jonathan Steiner*

It can be so easy for us to spend our energy on supporting the church, that we have nothing left over for the mission of the church. As Christians, we are called into discipleship, to follow Christ and invite others into that same journey. But as members or leaders of churches, we get tunnel vision about what is going to happen to "MY church." Have you ever gone through a church meeting, and realized you barely talked about the love of Jesus, or about what God wants us to do? That's what I'm talking about.

We need to constantly remind ourselves and our communities that the church is not ours, it is Christ's. In times of stress, we tend to turn inward, focusing on what WE need to keep going. But the Gospel does not need us, we need the Gospel. The whole point of the church is to tell us and the world that God loves us, no matter what.

I invite you as the South Dakota Synod, and as a congregation based on grace through Christ, to renew our focus on discipleship. Let's make sure we are making decisions out of faith and not fear, that we ground ourselves and our communities in scripture, that we are growing in relationship with God and inviting others to do the same. God is calling us, and thanks be to God that the Holy Spirit sweeps us into action!

### **"How long, O Lord?"**

*Rev. Renee Splichal Larson*

"How long, O Lord?" the Psalmist writes (Psalm 13). Perhaps the psalmist sighs these lyrics, their pain and longing so deep there are no other words. Perhaps they shout the words out of frustration or anger. Or maybe they cry them, cheeks stained with unending tears. "How long, O Lord?"

Lately I have found myself asking that question. Right now, I ask out of a longing to know. "How long, O Lord, will life feel out of whack?"

I want to know when I can visit my loved ones without fear of transmitting illness. I want to know if my five-year-old can go to kindergarten in the Fall. I want to know that my husband and I are making the right decision by putting our kids back in daycare after juggling work and home life for the last 16 weeks. I want to know if kids are safe in their own homes, or if some are going hungry, or when people can safely go back to work. I want to know: How long, O Lord, will we be so politically divided? I want to know how much longer people can hold out emotionally and mentally, as we all wait with expectant hope for a vaccine or effective treatment for COVID-19. I want to know ... how long, O Lord?

Some may say this is not a helpful question, but along with the Psalmist, I ask it. I don't expect an exact answer, but I do have a promise from God, that God hears the question and the longing within it. This is a faithful and prayerful question, because we speak it to the One who holds together all things, the One who is our past, present, and future. And we, like the Psalmist, trust in God's steadfast love (verse 5), no matter how long we must wait for what we deem to be new life.

There is a song in the Evangelical Lutheran Worship book (i.e. the "cranberry" or "red" or "new" hymnal), called "How Long, O God." It is hymn #698. The lyrics were written by Ralph Smith. Ralph served as a professor and dean of the chapel at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, IA. While I attended seminary at Wartburg, I learned of Ralph Smith, of his life and of his tragic death because of a car accident at the age of 44. I cannot sing this hymn without thinking of this man I have never met.

Perhaps in this time where communal singing poses a great danger to those gathered, we can pray our beloved hymns. Maybe it will give us a chance to pay more attention to the words and how they get planted in our hearts and minds. Hymn #698 is a hymn I find worth praying. It is a psalm in and of itself. Verse five both asks the question and proclaims our hope: "How long, O God?" the psalmist cries, a cry we make our own. Though we are lost, alone, afraid, our God will lead us home."

## **General Housekeeping as ministry goes on – August 2020:**

### **Community Assistance Resources:**

The economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have thrust many of our neighbors into the sometimes-confusing world of U.S. public assistance programs. ELCA World Hunger's newest set of one-page guides will help potential applicants in all 50 states and Washington, D.C., get started in applying for benefits they and their families may need:

- Unemployment insurance
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
- Rental and housing resources from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- Child care assistance (for most states)

Resources can be downloaded at

<https://blogs.elca.org/worldhunger/covid-assistance/>.

### **ELCA World Hunger VBS at Home:**

Bring your community together safely this summer for VBS! Explore easy adaptations of games, crafts and stories to learn about the Lord's Prayer at home. Join the [ELCA World Hunger VBS Facebook](#) group to learn, share and create modifications with others around the country.

Resources can be downloaded at

<https://www.elca.org/Resources/ELCA-World-Hunger#VBS>.

### **Subscribe to the Synod News:**

A good way to stay informed and updated is to subscribe to the Synod news. This can be done by visiting <https://sdsynod.org/> and inserting your email address into the box at the bottom of the home screen where it says "sign-up for Synod news" and hit the yellow subscribe button. We will keep you informed as postponed events get rescheduled as well as continue to share reliable information and resources regarding COVID-19, and how our ministries are moving forward amidst these times.