



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

## September 2020 Newsletter Inserts

### From the Bishop's Desk

Siblings in Christ,

*"Train up a child in the way it should go, and when it is old, it will not depart from it." - Proverbs 22:6*

Easier said than done these days when all things education seem to be everything they weren't last year at this time. As you read these lines, many school districts and higher education facilities have opened their physical and virtual doors to students and educators. Some walk through these doors fully confident that everything will be just like it was when they left the building. Others are not ready to return to any facility or "normal" activities yet. Wherever you are, please know that we hold you in prayer, and we understand. These times are stretching us all and show us our limits and boundaries.

At a staff meeting one member of the team shared that they had attended a bible study in which they were invited to think of this crisis as a classroom. Therefore what are we learning? And how are we applying what we are learning? Your synod staff learned that we will need to remain flexible in what we offer to people as they look at us to find Christ's word of new life and hope.

Therefore, the synod staff and a team of dedicated rostered and lay leaders have been working hard to create a "Canvas" of online curriculum that aid your congregation's faith formation opportunities (Confirmation and Sunday School).

If you would like to learn more about these resources and how you can use them in your context and connect with others that use them also, feel free to reach out to your synod office and one of our staff members will share with you how we can be partners in forming faith in times that are uncertain, but where Christ remains the same today, as he was yesterday and will be tomorrow.

Grace and peace,  
Bishop Constanze

### Thank You!

*Rev. Jonathan Steiner*

*"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, as indeed you are doing." - 1 Thessalonians 5:11*

Even in the midst of everything going on, we have lots to be thankful for! In the month of August, we received yet

another round of grants to support our ministries here in South Dakota. This is the third grant of \$7,500 from the ELCA for the COVID-19 response. This grant money has been used to support vulnerable ministries like Pueblo de Dios, First Lutheran African Ministry, Church on the Street, Woyatan, and the Pine Ridge Reconciliation Center. We have also been able to direct funds to congregations focused on providing essential feeding ministries, such as Trinity in Rapid City and Shalom in Harrisburg. We have also received \$30,000 from Lutheran Disaster Response, aiding ministries in a similar manner.

These ministries are also supported by members and congregations like you. Donations of finances, equipment, and supplies help keep everything moving, even during the pandemic. Please check in with your partner ministry leaders, and see how they are doing. Let them know that you care about them and the work they do. Ask if there is anything your congregation can do to help support them. Pray for them, personally, and as a group. We are stronger as a church when we continue to build our relationships with each other!

Thank you for all you do, and for God blessing us with generosity.

### Out in the World

*Rev. Renee Splichal Larson*

I've been thinking about Mary and Martha's brother, Lazarus. I've always felt sorry for the guy. I wonder if he heard Jesus' voice calling his name outside of his tomb and thought it was the final resurrection of the dead. Bound in grave clothes, he makes his way into the light, only to realize that he was resuscitated right back into the world he breathed his last breath, four days prior. An appropriate response from Lazarus would be, "Uffda."

I cannot imagine that much about Lazarus' resuscitated life after death was the same. Scripture is silent as to what Lazarus actually thinks about Jesus' miracle, or how he feels about having to die, yet again. It takes less than a chapter in the Gospel of John, after the raising of Lazarus, for us to find out that the chief priests plot to kill Lazarus "since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus (John 12.11)."

At this point, it's safe to say that life will never be the same for Lazarus. Most likely there is no back to normal for him. But this is not unique to Lazarus in Scripture. Life was never the same for Mary after the angel Gabriel paid her a visit. There was no back to normal for Paul after Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Life was never the same for the Israelites after the exile. There was no back to normal for those who followed Jesus after he appeared to them in the flesh after his crucifixion.

There are certain things that happen, and life will never be the same. There's a diagnosis, or a death. There is a marriage proposal, or a baby is born. There is a job opportunity across the country, or a family farm sold. There is natural disaster, or divorce. There is baptism, and there is conversion. There is war, or even a pandemic.

After something life-changing happens, "normal" is no longer normal. Sometimes we grieve this, other times we are ready for change. And sometimes, whatever occurs, affects a whole community, and in some cases, the whole world.

We are in a pandemic. All of us are affected. We are getting used to wearing masks, and are more aware than ever how close we may be standing next to someone. The pandemic has fast forwarded how we think about and are the body of Christ (the church together), literally out in the world.

One of the many things I love about the story of the raising of Lazarus is when he comes out of his grave. John 11:44 says: *"The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'"*

Jesus invites the community to participate in the new life given to Lazarus. What's comfortable about unbinding a neighbor who has been dead four days? What might it be like now to go over for supper to Mary, Martha, and Lazarus' house? I wonder what "back to normal" looked like in the village of Bethany; or, if there was never a "back to normal," but rather, life anew. We do not know how the church will look five months or five years from now, during or after a pandemic. But we do know that God is the sustainer of our life, our beloved SD Synod, the ELCA, and the whole church universal.

We can either get stuck in longing for how things used to be before \_\_\_\_\_, or, we can grieve as we begin to notice the ways in which God is making all things new. We have a God who brings life out of death. The resuscitation of Lazarus, and the resurrection of Jesus, speak to this phenomenon in our world. What I have come to understand is that the life God brings forth after a life-altering event, is not the same kind of life we once had. Rather, it is life, and it is new.

Thanks be to God that Jesus calls us out into the world in which God is on the loose: healing, loving, reconciling, forgiving, feeding, strengthening, challenging, growing, and raising from death to life.

## **"God's work. Our hands." Sunday**

On Sunday, Sept. 13, congregations will observe "God's work. Our hands." Sunday. This year our church — and our world — are living through the COVID-19 pandemic. Physical distancing has changed the way we worship and serve. But the need is great, and God's church is at work.

We encourage you to plan your day of service in compliance with local health guidelines. The safety and well-being of your volunteers and those you serve is a top priority. Follow all local guidance regarding physical distancing, mask-wearing, maximum gathering size and building capacity limits. Acts of service can happen anywhere: you might contribute to an online project from your home or volunteer in person keeping a safe physical distance and wearing a mask.

To help you plan for "God's work. Our hands." Sunday, we invite you to visit [ELCA.org/DayofService](https://www.elca.org/DayofService) for several resources. Don't forget to share your congregation's participation with us! Send your stories and photos to [LivingLutheran@elca.org](mailto:LivingLutheran@elca.org) so that together we can celebrate what God accomplishes through you. Participate on social media using #GodsWorkOurHands

## **Planned Generosity**

Giving motivated by faith and a determination to make a difference, with an intentional process followed through to completion. That's why Lutheran Planned Giving of South Dakota was created—to help you think about all that God has entrusted to your care, and to create a plan so that your life's legacy is a testament to your faith, an example to your heirs, and a blessing to all those who benefit when you listen to God's call. The pandemic has forced us to look at everything we do in a different light, causing many postponements and cancellations. But it's not an excuse to postpone your legacy plan. In fact, it may be just the motivation you need to tackle the project and get it done. LPGSD is here and ready to help. As a free ministry of the South Dakota Synod and our sponsoring ELCA partners across the state, we'll start with a confidential conversation, whether by phone, Zoom, or in a safe, socially-distanced meeting. We can then offer tax saving strategies and demonstrate plans that will benefit your children and the causes that mean the most to you. The hungry and thirsty are waiting. The stranger and the naked are waiting. The sick and the prisoner are waiting. *Are you ready to make a difference? Matthew 25:35-40.*

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