

Hosanna *Lutheran Church*



2021 Annual Report of the Congregation

Sunday, January 31, 2021

	Page #
Call to Order	
Prayer	
Approval of Minutes from 2020 Congregational Meeting	2-3
Reports:	
Acting President	4
Pastor	4
Christian Education	5
Evangelism	5-6
Property	6
Social Ministries	6-7
WELCA	7
Worship & Music	7-8
Stewardship	8
Audit Report	8
Treasurer	9-10
- Account Balances	9
- Historical Income/Expenses + 2021 Budget	10
Parish Statistics	11
ELCA Presiding Bishop	12
Old Business:	
None	
New Business:	
Nominations and Elections	11
2021 Budget	10
Business from the floor	
Adjournment	
Prayer	

2020 Annual Meeting Minutes - January 26, 2020

Submitted by Janeen Bollhoefer, Congregation Secretary

Call to Order

- Called to order by Ryan Herman at 10:54am.
- Number in attendance: 61

Devotion

Approval of Minutes from 2018 Congregational Meetings:

- Annual meeting of January 28, 2018
- Special congregational meeting of September 16, 2018
 - Motion to approve the meeting minutes from both the Annual Meeting on January 28, 2018, and the Special Congregational Meeting on September 16, 2018, by Nancy Kunkel. Second – Justin Noel. Approved.

Reports:

- President – special thanks to Pastor Mike and Dr. Dan Bruggeman for their service.
 - Ryan Herman, President, encouraged members to be more generous in their giving. He also encouraged members to consider electronic giving.
- Pastor
 - The weekly worship attendance average has stayed the same in 2018 (compared to 2017).
 - There are also many new members in our congregation.
 - One quarter of those worshipping each week are 18 years old or younger.
 - Thanks to the congregation for their generosity and sharing of gifts.
 - Congregational Vitality survey results are in, and will be discussed at a meeting with the new council.
 - Picture directory will be displayed on a bulletin board in the fellowship hall – Pastor would like help with this.
 - Hosanna! Happenings have been revamped to be more accessible
 - Pastor Mike encouraged members to view the ads for each ministry in the report and consider volunteering or learning more about those that are of interest
- Evangelism
 - Searching for someone to coordinate evangelism ministries
- Social Ministries
- Property
- Christian Education
- WELCA
 - Karen Orrill announced that every woman in the congregation is already a member of WELCA, and encouraged involvement
- Stewardship
- Worship and Music
 - Review the ads and sign up if you are interested – in particular, they are in need of Assisting Ministers, Communion Assistants, and Lectors
- Treasurer's Report
 - Discussion of mortgage payments and benevolence
 - THANK YOU to Leslie Long for her tireless work as the Treasurer
- Audit Committee Report
- Memorial Fund

Continued...

- Where did our offerings go in 2018?
 - Pastor Mike pointed out the \$1,439 that was donated in the children's offering last year.
- 2019 Budget
- Parish Statistics
- 2019 Ballot

Old Business

- None

New Business

- 2019 Nominations and Elections
 - Open for additional nominations.
 - Motion to close the nominations by Marty Berggren. Second – Justin Noel. Approved.
- 2019 Budget
 - Pastor Mike gave an overview of budget numbers and pledges
 - Council presented the 2019 budget. Bill George moved to approve the 2019 budget as presented. Second – Janeen Bollhoefer. Approved.
- Election Results

Council Officers

Vice-President – Robert Hall (2-year term)
 Secretary – Janeen Bollhoefer (2-year term)
 President – Ryan Herman (will begin his second of a 2-year term)
 Treasurer – Leslie Long (will begin a second of a 2-year term)

Council

Tony Belcher (2-year term)
 Carla George (2-year term)
 Karen Orrill (2-year term)
 Larry Miller (1-year term to complete Dairiane Cobb's term)
 Dan Prom (will begin his second of a 2-year term)

2019 Synod Assembly Voting Members

Barb and John Chapman

Nominating Committee (prepare January 2020 ballot)

Brad Kunkel	Dan Luellen
Sarah Read	Nikki Williams
Dan Prom	Larry Miller (both as outgoing council)

2019 Audit Committee Member

Russ Bollhoefer (audit 2019; 2020; 2021 books)
 Don Summers (audit 2018; 2019; 2020 books)
 Julie Scott (audit 2017, 2018; 2019 books)

Cleaning Committees

Ryan Herman, Chris Jung, Justin Noel will lead cleaning teams.
 There will be a checklist of items to clean

Motion to close by Bill George. Second – Nancy Kunkel. Meeting adjourned at 11:59am.

Prayer

Acting President's Report

Submitted by Robert Hall, acting President

Hello, and Happy New Year to you all! It's been said, and I will reiterate, GOODBYE 2020! This past year has been trying for all of us. Stay at home/work from home, Virtual this-Virtual that, the loss of loved ones, families and friends kept at distance. While it is important to learn from what the past year has taken from us, it is even more important to remember what it has given us. It has given us strength, encouragement, and hope.

While I can't predict what 2021 will bring, I can promise you is that we have a stronger HOSANNA! Family today then we did this time last year. I have seen deeper, more meaningful conversations occurring than in years past. Phone calls, HOSANNA-Grams, Bless Boxes, Drive-In worship, Dialogues on Race, Drive-thru communion, Candlelight Christmas in the Vineyard, and overall-families being more connected with each other through social media and "Liking" or commenting on each other's lives that are continuing on have kept us connected. All things we may not have had time for in the past because we were rushing off to something else.

It's amazing to see. The World Did Not Stop, and Neither Did We; We kept moving forward! With the help of our amazing staff- Pastor Mike, Cathy, Dan, the church council, the weekly volunteers- **WE PERSEVERED!**

I am confident that we will continue to find creative ways to stay connected and soon we will be able to see each other in person and break bread together once again. If I can offer any bit of encouragement for those who need it- Stay strong in your faith, stay connected with one another, and reach out to someone if you are in need. **Keep moving forward, TOGETHER.**

Pastor's Report

Submitted by Pastor Mike Kern

I never imagined the church needing to stop meeting for months at a time, but here we are. It's been really hard, but I believe our sacrifice has made a difference to help keep members, our extended family, our friends, and the larger community safer. Thank you for sticking together through it all.

I miss seeing all of you regularly. Even the small weekly interactions add up to a lot of relationship. At the same time, I appreciate the unique opportunities this situation has presented to spend more in deeper conversation with people through online studies, phone conversations, meeting in driveways for back-to-school-blessings, and drive-thru Communion. If you haven't participated in any of these, I invite you to take advantage of the opportunities.

This time has also reminded us that the church is more than a building. It's pushed us to think about what's most important to us. Conversation with our Vision Team, council, and individuals has reinforced what is essential to Hosanna: relationships. We value having a place to belong, knowing people who care without judgment, being part of something bigger than ourselves, finding hope and renewal every week, and delighting in the faith of children.

On top of 2020, 2021 has already proved to be tough for our world and our congregation. Nonetheless, I have hope for our future. Our hope is not based on a number on the calendar, but on our God that never abandons us in our darkest times. God is with us, and God has given us one another. Whether it's someone checking in, offering encouraging words, doing thoughtful actions, asking penetrating questions, providing gentle correction, or something else, I see Christ in you, and that is what gives me the most hope.

This year will still be challenging, but we'll make it together--with each other and with God. I look forward to watching the Gospel of Hosanna! continue to unfold, and having the privilege of preaching the Good News--the story of God's action in you.

Christian Education

Submitted by Alison Kern, Christian Education Chair

As with many aspects of our lives in 2020, our approach to faith formation among our Hosanna! family took a different path this year. I'm proud to say that with the help of many--and the flexibility and dedication of all--we had a great year, in spite of the challenges of the pandemic.

In-person Sunday School wasn't possible for most of the year due to COVID restrictions. However, several volunteers came together (separately!) to put together family resources for all our kids and teens. We made kids bags with themed activities for each week of our parking lot worship services, and Bless Boxes, a monthly kit with activities, videos and resources for families to grow in faith together at home. I would like to especially thank Katharine Fairchild for her knowledge and time in putting these materials together for our families.

Some of our adult groups, like the weekly Bible study, continued to meet virtually, and Pastor Mike organized new study groups on topics like racism, mindfulness, and simply connecting with one another in a time of distancing.

Pastor Mike personally delivered backpack/laptop/iPad blessings as well as Bibles to every child who was due to receive one this year as part of our Rally Day tradition. We were even able to continue our tradition of a Christmas program, thanks to many families who figured out Zoom backgrounds, homemade costumes, and "sheep" dogs for our virtual pageant, "Do Not Be Afraid!"

Our God Squad continues to stay connected digitally and prepare for the next ELCA Youth Gathering, which was moved from 2021 to July 2022 due to the pandemic. Their fundraiser this year was handmade Hosanna! Christmas ornaments, designed by the students and crafted by Pastor Mike. Many of them have also helped with leading worship services during the year.

If we've learned anything about all kinds of education this year, it's that our capacity to learn new things at ANY age is truly a gift from God. Our students and school staff have had to make huge adjustments to schooling, we've all had to learn some new technology, and we've had to rely on digital connection like never before. But just as we've learned throughout our lives, God is always with us and gives us the ability to adapt and grow in our faith, even in adversity.

I have every confidence that we will continue to learn and grow as one Hosanna! family in the year to come!

Evangelism

Submitted by Pastor Mike Kern

This year has been both challenging and encouraging for evangelism at Hosanna! While it's more difficult to invite people into the close relationships that make Hosanna! what it is, the pandemic has spurred us to invest in our online presence.

Most obviously, we invested in video equipment that allows us to stream every worship service online. It not only allows homebound members to participate in real time, but also allows active members to join worship when home sick or at a later time if unable to attend at the regular time. Many of Hosanna's faithful have invited relatives and friends to join our worship, and although they rarely comment online, we are reaching many who are not regular members.

We also created a whole new website that is more dynamic and interactive. We can now post content with more details than newsletters, bulletins, and social media allow. We have places to share meaningful pictures, stories, and resources. We've created space to leave messages for grieving members and join memorial services from across the country. We've also made a concerted effort to post more to Facebook and link to other great resources across the internet.

Evangelism is by definition “sharing the Good News.” Although the pandemic means that less of our efforts have translated directly into increased membership, we are blessed to be reaching more people with inspiration, encouragement, and direction than before, at a time when so many people are yearning for grace and hope.

Property

Submitted by Scott Schmidt, Property Chair

Well, the past year isn't what we all expected. Our place of worship awaits the day when we all can meet and continue the activities that we use to do. While the church has limited action lately, we still have the responsibility to maintain and keep up with the grounds. We have been able to save money on the use of less energy, as well as the purchase of supplies to clean or for other operations. While many of small projects and repair were put on hold this past, I would like to see if can accomplish a few this coming year. A few is to repair window screens, fix up the sign, and continue to keep bushes trimmed up. Over this past year, it looks like we need to replace a second water heater.

While our place of gathering awaits our return, I would like to thank those who still come up to look around and keep us posted of any concerns. When that day comes when we get the green light, I ask for additional help on upkeep of cleaning the church. A couple of helpers that I teamed up with have moved and will need assistances. Due to the limit use of the church, I have been able to go up at least once a month to make sure bathrooms are clean and do spot clean any floors. If there is something you see or want to tackle, don't worry, I won't say no. Any help or time that you can put in is a great help. While this place is big, it is still a great place to worship and put a positive outlook in our community.

Social Ministry

Submitted by Louise Ahrens, Social Ministry Chair

Valentine's for Vets – with the assistance of several members, over 100 hygiene kits were assembled for local vets. The highlight was the handmade Valentines made by the Sunday School children!

The pandemic changed so many of the team's in person activities, like the monthly ingathering for In As Much Ministry, and ingathering for Metro Lutheran Ministry.

- In As Much Ministry – food and personal items were donated through March. Two members from Hosanna! Works in the office helping clients. Many thanks to Marjorie Yates and Peggy Miller!
- MLM Christmas Store Activities
- Christmas in July - members were encouraged to donate via online by providing the websites to shop via Amazon and/or contribute cash.
- Christmas Store - articles were place in the Happenings indicating the opportunities to contribute cash; shop online and/or leave donations at church. In addition, there was an article highlighting how to apply for a Thrivent Action Team Card, as another way to contribute to the Store. For those who felt comfortable, a link was provided to volunteer at the store. The team is aware of eight Hosanna! Members who volunteered. Many thanks to all who assisted in providing Christmas gifts to approximately 1,450 families at the Store.
- Prayer Weavers - persevered despite COVID-19 during 2020 donating 1,529 blankets to Children's Mercy Hospital. There was a period of approximately 90 days where no one was accepting donations. The blankets were stored in the interim. The doctors wanted our blankets so once donations were again accepted, nearly 500 blankets were taken to CMH. Due to COVID-19, the blankets now must be commercially washed and dried. With that being said, we had to change to

very simple crocheted edges that would withstand commercial laundering. We also got very creative on how to meet. We gather in Jane Bradbury's garage with masks and social distancing. We still manage to have some social time together along with blanket gathering though sometimes the garage is "chilly!" While we fell short of our goal of 2,000 blankets in 2020, we are confident we will meet and/or exceed that goal in 2021!

Thank you so much for all your support!

Social Ministry Team: Louise Ahrens, Marty Berggren, Jane Gibbs, Sharon Goins, Donna Krugman, Karen Orrill, Marjorie Yates

Women of the ELCA

Submitted by Karen Orrill, 2020 WELCA Chair

Shirley Circle meets the second Monday of each month. Due to this year's pandemic all meetings beginning with the month of April were held via zoom. Meetings open with devotions and, after the meeting, a member leads study using Gather, the magazine of Women of the ELCA. 10% of offerings taken in is sent to the Central States Women of the ELCA.

Currently being led by this group, the Liberty Hospital basket program, which donates snacks monthly for the surgery waiting area and ICU waiting room, was suspended in April, due to the pandemic. The program will resume when the hospital gives permission to do so.

- 2020 projects and assistance to others included:
- \$450.00 to Metropolitan Lutheran Ministries
- \$450.00 to In As Much Ministries
- \$200.00 to Love, INC.
- \$100.00 to Children's Mercy Hospital for purchase of activity items for patient use. In addition, members purchased items on their own and delivered them to Marie Summers who then delivered them to the hospital. Extra items were needed this year as they could not be reused.

2020's Central States Synod's Women of the ELCA convention was canceled this year due to the pandemic.

All women are welcome at meetings and other events held by Women of the ELCA.

Worship and Music

Submitted by Margaret Grote, Worship and Music Chair

As with so many other aspects of our lives in the year 2020, worship and music at Hosanna! has seen changes and the need for extreme flexibility. Changes to liturgy throughout the year were made with the different ways we were worshipping in mind. Hosanna! worshiped in person and socially distanced, in the parking lot, live online and by recorded online worship with drive thru communion being served as well. I appreciate the guidance of Pastor Mike and the church council through the decision-making process of how we would worship. Dr. Dan and Pastor Mike have worked hard to keep worship meaningful and accessible to all with the new recording technology knowledge they've acquired.

We have been fortunate to have church members able to be part of church music throughout the year. This type of service from our talented members helps us feel connected to each other with their familiar voices to sing along with from wherever we are worshipping from. Dr. Dan has been invaluable in coordinating members to share their musical gifts throughout the year and provide his own beautiful music to lead us.

If you would like to be part of the worship and music team for helping pick hymns and liturgy or would like to share your musical talents, please contact me or Dr. Dan. We look forward to a year of more members

participating and hopeful for our worship space to be filled with our voices together.

What has stood out to me most for this year is how everyone has helped step up and make sure we continue meaningful worship while trying to stay as safe as possible for each other and ourselves. The flexibility and sharing of gifts many didn't realize they had, was beautiful to see even from the sidelines. While we hope to be in our sanctuary to worship every week, it is helpful to know that we as a church can gather wherever we are to share the good news!

Stewardship

Submitted by Pastor Mike Kern

Not being able to gather regularly in groups has made it more difficult to offer our time and talents together. However, Hosanna! members have not stopped practicing their faith beyond the walls of the building. There are countless stories of members checking in on each other, writing to and calling each other, baking for each other, delivering gifts to each other, and sewing blankets (1,517 to be exact). This year has put a spotlight on what it means to be stewards of more than just money, but of relationships.

Understandably, not passing the offering plate has resulted in a decrease in financial giving. Offerings were about 10% lower this year. Although not encouraging, it's consistent (and in fact better) than many other congregations are experiencing. Fortunately, reduced expenses and securing a Payroll Protection Program loan/grant helped us finish the year in the black.

Continuing to be financially sustainable going forward (without the mortgage forbearance and stimulus grant) will require us to continue strong and regular giving, even as gatherings are still limited. It will continue to be a challenge staying in the habit of regular giving. However, many of you have already been very generous, regular, attentive, and willing to give in new ways to support the ministry we share, and we thank you for that. It makes a big difference.

Audit Report

Submitted by Hosanna! Lutheran Church Audit Committee

The Audit Committee has completed the audit of Hosanna! Lutheran church for the fiscal year 2019. As has been the practice of the Committee, a complete audit is conducted every other year, with the alternate years receiving a "partial audit". The fiscal year 2019 was a year for a partial audit to be conducted. For purposes of this audit, four (4) months were randomly selected. No major items were identified.

Hosanna! Lutheran Church Audit Committee:

Don Summers (term: audit years of 2017, 2018, 2019)

Russell Bollhoefer (term: audit years of 2018, 2019, 2020)

Bryan Williams (term: audit years of 2019, 2020, 2021)

Giving in 2020 was impacted by the economic impact of the pandemic. The reduction was just over 11%. In recognition of this factor, the church was able to also reduce a number of expenses. Part of this was related to not conducting services in the church for a substantial portion of the year. Office expenses and utilities in particular produced significant savings. An agreement was also struck with Thrivent, our mortgage holder, to postpone payments of mortgage principal from three months until the end of the mortgage.

In total, expenses were down 9% from prior year. The overall negative financial impact of the pandemic was offset by the payroll protection grant of almost \$29,000 that was received in 2020. The end result is that Hosanna ended the year with an increase of almost \$20,000 in its undesignated cash in the bank.

BANK ACCOUNT BALANCES

	<u>12/31/2019</u>	<u>12/31/2020</u>
CHECKING ACCOUNT	\$59,707.60	\$77,033.49
Building Reserve	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00
Continuing Ed	\$1,552.59	\$2,217.86
Discretionary Fund	\$264.66	\$264.66
Youth	\$3,101.01	\$3,551.01
Undesignated	\$34,789.34	\$54,550.97
 MEMORIAL ACCOUNT	 \$10,368.84	 \$10,056.65

The base assumption for the budget is that 2021 will be like 2020 in most financial respects. It is not assumed that giving will rebound to 2019 levels except for the impact of donations already deposited in January. Because we are starting the year not meeting in the church, some types of expense are expected to be less than the budget for 2020, but higher than the 2020 experience. There is a \$5,000 raise for Pastor Mike in the budget to reflect both his hard work in this extraordinary year, and a level of compensation that reflects his level of experience. While the budget reflects a loss for the year, that loss is backed up by the undesignated funds in the bank. While we will investigate a second payroll protection grant, it is too uncertain for inclusion in the budget.

HISTORICAL INCOME / EXPENSES + 2021 BUDGET

INCOME	2018 Actual	2019 Actual	2020 Budget	2020 Actual	2021 Budget	Comments
Faith Commitments/Envelopes	\$155,835	\$134,862	\$163,132	\$51,140	\$135,270	Amount pledged by 32 households for 2021 (2021 budget = 2020 total income plus delayed deposit - 2021 pledges)
Free Will & Loose	\$82,687	\$112,197	\$83,927	\$160,265	\$110,570	
Designated to Operating Expenses	\$1,045	\$0	\$0	\$8,435		
Payroll Protection Grant				\$28,787		Provision of Federal CARES Act
TOTAL INCOME	\$239,567	\$247,059	\$247,059	\$248,627	\$245,840	Assumed that giving is same as 2020 excl. Payroll Protection Grant + delayed deposit
EXPENSES	2018 Actual	2019 Actual	2020 Budget	2020 Actual	2021 Budget	Comments
BENEVOLENCE	\$8,767	\$3,000	\$4,000	\$4,936	\$4,000	One 2019 payment made in 2020. Keep Budget Level
SALARIES, BENEFITS, & TAXES	\$131,852	\$135,419	\$141,775	\$138,453	\$148,118	
Pastor Salary, Housing, SECA Allowance	\$56,644	\$57,421	\$62,902	\$57,920	\$63,227	\$5,000 increase for 2021 + impact of self employment tax
Pastor Benefits	\$34,074	\$32,651	\$32,421	\$38,263	\$39,469	Health Insurance expected to increase in cost plus change in way benefits are paid.
Pastor Continuing Education	\$1,000	\$800	\$800	\$135	\$800	Follows Synod Guidelines; placed into rolling fund
Pastor Mileage	\$1,180	\$1,129	\$1,400	\$198	\$800	For work-related travel at IRS rate
Supply Pastors	\$968	\$816	\$840	\$0	\$840	\$150 + mileage per Sunday - Est. \$210 for 4 Sundays
Administrative Assistant + FICA	\$23,731	\$24,958	\$25,648	\$25,023	\$25,647	
Music Ministry	\$14,256	\$17,644	\$17,764	\$16,914	\$17,334	
MINISTRIES	\$56,938	\$44,944	\$50,180	\$36,126	\$42,497	
Office	\$12,003	\$8,546	\$8,600	\$3,611	\$6,000	Limited attendance for a good portion of 2021 expected.
Building & Property	\$18,602	\$10,323	\$13,000	\$12,748	\$11,000	
Utilities	\$12,728	\$13,363	\$14,000	\$8,549	\$11,000	Limited building usage for a good portion of 2021 expected.
Insurance	\$6,574	\$7,171	\$7,630	\$7,473	\$7,847	Increased insurance cost (+5%)
Christian Education	\$2,101	\$1,814	\$2,200	\$1,711	\$2,200	
Evangelism	\$508	\$186	\$400	\$552	\$1,000	Increased effort post pandemic restrictions
Fellowship	\$392	\$528	\$500	\$0	\$500	Unchanged
Social Ministry	\$0	\$50	\$150	\$121	\$150	Costs are often donated. Incl. Health and Wellness
Stewardship	\$280	\$563	\$500	\$310	\$500	Prior year as placeholder
Synod Assembly	\$957	\$883	\$1,200	\$0	\$300	Expect virtual event
Worship & Music	\$2,793	\$1,517	\$2,000	\$1,051	\$2,000	Prior budget as placeholder
MORTGAGE	\$58,608	\$63,936	\$63,936	\$57,982	\$63,936	Special provision by Thrivent postponed 3 principal payments in 2019.
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$256,165	\$247,299	\$259,891	\$237,498	\$258,550	
TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET	2018 Actual	2019 Actual	2020 Budget	2020 Actual	2021 Budget	
INCOME	\$239,567	\$247,059	\$247,059	\$248,627	\$245,840	
EXPENSE	\$256,165	\$247,299	\$259,891	\$237,498	\$258,550	
DIFFERENCE	-\$16,599	-\$240	-\$12,832	\$11,129	-\$12,710	

Parish Statistics

Baptisms

Grayson Michael Belcher February 16
Preston Gerald Belcher February 16
Margaret Louise Cerra November 1

New Members

Bethany Rutter-Kempees September 24

Membership Total

Baptized: 249 [2019: 248, 2018: 245, 2017: 289]
Confirmed: 182 [2019: 184, 2018: 182, 2017: 218]

Deaths

Cora Rodick April 4
Janet Baken August 19
Tony Musgrave December 17
Tina Hyland December 22

Funerals

Cora Rodick April 18
Janet Baken September 5
Tina Hyland December 30

Average Worship Attendance:

80 [2019: 102, 2018: 110, 2017: 110]

Note: 2020 attendance is estimated based on comments for online worship. It is likely significantly higher.

Nominations

Submitted by 2020 Nominating Committee

Tony Belcher, Karen Orrill, Kathy Brammer, Jeanine Stubbs, Scott Schmidt

Officers (2-year term)

President Robert Hall (2nd term—completing 2nd year of existing term)
Vice President Tony Belcher (2nd term)

Continuing: Treasurer - Mike Plesko & Secretary - Janeen Bollhoefer

Council (2-year term)

Ben Oprinovich (1st term - completing 2nd year of existing term)
Jeanine Stubbs (1st term)
Beth Schoening (1st term)
Jane Gibbs (1st term)

Continuing: Mary Kunkel (1st term)

Synod Assembly Voting Members

Margaret Grote Jeremy Grote

Nominating Committee (1-year term)

Mary Kunkel (outgoing council) Ben Oprinovich (outgoing council)
Katharine Fairchild Chris Heil
Sarah Read Pam Schmidt

Audit Committee Member (3-year term)

Scott Schmidt (2021; 2022; 2023)

Continuing: Bryan Williams (2020; 2021; 2022) & Russ Bollhoefer (2019; 2020; 2021)



A MESSAGE FROM ELCA PRESIDING BISHOP ELIZABETH EATON

Dear friends in Christ,

This year has been a challenging one! The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the church and society. We have had to shift the ways we engage in ministry from a focus on in-person worship and meetings to livestream worship, virtual meetings and gatherings in the parking lot. We have had to shift to teaching children at home and working from home. We have not been able to travel to see friends or relatives or to celebrate life events. This has also been a time to address economic and social justice issues, to shift our thinking and our way of life.

In times such as this, our baptism in Christ makes a difference and makes us different. Like Christians before us, we recall that God is faithful to God's promises and God's people. We see that God enables us to connect with one another even when we are separated. Shifts in the world invite us to be innovative in how we do God's work and reach out to all ages in making disciples. We see that God is at work not only in our buildings but beyond them as well. We have found new ways to serve our neighbors and reach those in need.

As we experience this time of uncertainty, we sense something new emerging. In many places there are new strategies and renewed energy for ministry, often generated by emerging leaders. We have developed a framework to build on, and now is the time to engage in hard work together. As you do in your congregation, we want our collaborative efforts to be both faithfully thoughtful and sustainable. We want to build up the body of Christ today and for the future.

Looking across the church, I am grateful for your generous giving of time, talents and resources. Yes, God does continue to bless us! God will provide both relief from life's struggles and hope for a stronger church, God's church. We do not need to know how the future will unfold. As members in the body of Christ, we need only trust that God is with us and will provide.

Building up the body of Christ together,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton

Presiding Bishop

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love." —Ephesians 4:11-16