

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church



The Teller July, 2020

From Bishop Bill Gafkjen

Dear People of God across the Indiana-Kentucky
Mission Territory,

As I open my laptop to write this pastoral letter the evening news is telling us that COVID-19 is surging in almost half of the United States. Dr. Anthony Fauci and other medical experts are referring to this as a “disturbing surge” and are reminding us that it’s crucial we continue to avoid large crowds and wear facemasks in order to protect ourselves and others. At the same time, protests and debates about racism and racial justice are rising up among us, demanding our attention and action to combat racism and dismantle white supremacy.

This wilderness journey has been long and arduous, the insidious coronavirus wilderness, certainly, but also the much longer and pernicious wilderness of racism. Despite some hopeful signs here and there, we will not emerge from either wilderness anytime soon. It is essential that we keep moving forward patiently, hopefully, diligently, and together. We will move forward with fits and starts, meanderings and missteps along the way, for sure, but we can and will entrust ourselves and one another to the promised presence, forgiveness, grace, and hope of God in Christ as we find and follow the way toward God’s promised future as a church that witnesses to the Spirit of Christ, loves and serves our neighbors, and works toward a just, truthful, and peaceful community for all.

We have learned – and continue to learn – new things about ourselves and what it means to be the body of Christ. We have tried new ways of worshipping God, being fed spiritually, caring for one another, and serving our neighbors. We have let go of some things that just six months ago we thought were really important. Many of us have found our voice and committed ourselves in new ways to addressing racism – in ourselves, in our faith communities, and in civic life. These, and so many other experiences, are evidence that God is doing new things around, among, and through us, making life, joy, peace, and hope lived realities, even in the wilderness.

I give thanks for this new life. I give thanks for you, who have been willing to take some risks, try new things, keep the good of our neighbor at the fore, and honor and forgive one another along the way. It’s important to look for and listen deeply to what we have learned and continue to learn. What we learn will light the way through the wilderness and help us to lay foundations for the future.

Listening and learning together can also help us to be patient, diligent, and committed to the common good as we make decisions about the many important concerns before us these days, including the why, when, and how of in-person worship and other gatherings. This is a time for us to listen deeply, think creatively, and act boldly...together.

Because each local faith community needs to engage this discernment about how to conduct their ministry moving forward, including whether, when, and how to gather in-person, significant differences in process, timing, and practice are emerging among congregations across the synod and in local communities. This is healthy and good, as local context is crucial. But, it can also lead to misunderstandings, divisions, and criticism between members of congregations and their leaders, between congregations, or between ministers and leaders in a conference or community.

The witness of our wilderness-wandering forebears in faith attests to this. In a recently published and commendable short e-book entitled, “Leadership for a Time of Pandemic,” Tod Bolsinger reminds us that just six weeks after the miracle of the Red Sea, “The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron” (Exodus 16). Caught up in an understandable sense of loss of the past and anxiety about the future, the people turned on each other and their leaders.

Siblings in Christ, this is a time to collaborate, not compete. This is not a time to separate from a colleague or community because we disagree with decisions they've made. This is a time to stand together in grace, to honor one another, support one another, and work together for the sake of God's gospel mission rather than our own agendas, desires, or demands.

We certainly need to lament the losses, to be honest about our anxieties, and share our fears. Unlike what we see far too often in our civic life in this country, we who are marked with the cross of Christ and sealed in his Spirit can do all this in ways that build and deepen our unity in Christ rather than deepen divisions. We can offer our differing perspectives graciously, help one another to make good decisions, and then trust the decisions that are made and move forward together.

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name... [Philippians 2:1-9]

Finally, I finished writing this pastoral letter in the first days of some vacation time. I must admit that I enter this time with a profound need for rest, renewal and refocusing. I have no doubt that the leaders and ministers of your local faith community are at least as exhausted as I am; you, dear reader, may very well be one of them. Ministering and leading in this wilderness has been particularly challenging in more ways than can be rehearsed here. Suffice it to say that even Jesus took some time away, even and especially when the demands of ministry were intense. (See Mark 1:29-39, for example).

Please make space for your deacons, pastors, ministers, and leaders to take some time off and encourage them to go with Jesus to the quiet place of rest and renewal

for a time. They will return happier and healthier, more focused and fueled. The time of absence will empower them to be fully present for you and for the ministry entrusted to you together for the long haul ahead.

Listen deeply. Think creatively. Act boldly. Together. Loving God. Serving neighbor. Finding and making the path forward by walking it. For the love of Jesus. For the sake of the world. By the grace of God.

Peace be with you,

The Rev. Dr. William O. Gafkjen, Bishop

We are looking for people who are willing to record themselves reading the readings for Sunday worship. If you are interested, please contact either Pastor Amy or Clayton.

Don't forget to return your completed worship survey about transitioning back to in person worship. You can email it to office@zionlutheranchurch.net or mail it to the church at 113 West Main Street, North Manchester IN, 46962. Council will be meeting Tuesday, June 30 and would love your input as we make these important decisions.

If anyone would like their small group to begin meeting at the church again please submit your request to Pastor Amy at sanctuary.farm@yahoo.com, to Clayton at office@zionlutheranchurch.net, or to Dave Lawrenz at dlawrenz.123@gmail.com. We have guidelines that we will review with you for the safety of everyone.

From Pastor Amy

Ponder Anew...what the Almighty can do!

**Belong. Believe. Be Sent.
Share Jesus Christ for Life!**

Our mission statement. One developed many years ago but that has stood the test of time. Short. Concise. Easy to say. And now, thanks to Alan, can be sung as well. What does it really mean? For us as a congregation and for us who call Zion home? I'm going to take the next few months to look at just that. I invite you to share with me if and how you connect with the statement and any thoughts, ponders, feelings you have.

As I have begun reflecting on the statements as a whole and the words individually, one of the first questions I have to ask is "How has this changed due to the pandemic?" Zion is not the same as we were and we can't totally go back to our "normal". Some things will be the same but there will be changes and adjustments. So as we look at our mission statement, I have in the back of my mind the Bishops words "*Listen Deeply Think Creatively Act Boldly*" How might we do that in this context? I invite you to "*Ponder Anew*" with me.

This is how I started last month's Ponder Anew. I was disappointed no one shared any thoughts about Zion's mission statement. I really would appreciate hearing from you about our statement- especially as this is our guiding statement we use to help us determine our future direction.

In our mission statement, our second word is **Believe**. What does it mean to "believe"? Oxford Dictionary says: "1. Accept (something) as true; feel sure of the truth of. 2. Hold (something) as an opinion; think or suppose. Nelson's bible dictionary says "belief is to place one's trust in God's truth. A person who believes is one who takes God at his word and trusts in [God] for salvation." Also, "...involving commitment to [God's] will for one's life."

Accept as true... place one's trust in, one's commitment to God- for life, for salvation. Hmm. ...so do we believe? Is our trust really in God's truth? How committed are we really? When it's convenient for us? When we feel like it? Out of obligation or habit? Sacrificially? With all our heart and soul and body and mind? Not sure? By ourselves, it's probably the when convenient, we feel like it, out of habit and obligation. As humans, that's what we are able to do. When we allow God through the Spirit to work in us, it's probably more sacrificially and with our whole being- because that is what God is able to do.

In the explanation of our statement, we say that the Lord is calling Zion to *believe in Jesus Christ by virtue of faith given as a gift of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament*. In the words of Martin Luther, what does this mean? How would we explain it to someone who wasn't familiar with our church language and practices? How do we help them to understand what this means to us and why it is in our explanation? It is essential for us to be able to articulate this for non-church folks.

Taking it from back to front: *...through Word and Sacrament...* Through the Holy Scriptures, we are able to hear the nature of who our Triune God is, what we are being taught and what is being asked of us as "believers" or followers of Jesus. John 20:31 reminds us **31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.**

Through participating in Holy Communion, renewing our own Baptism and joining with others in their baptism, we are active in our belief and faith and begin to live it out.

Our belief is a gift given to us by the Holy Spirit. Like any gift, we can put it in a closet unopened, open it, admire it and tuck it away on a shelf or open it and begin to use it, letting it become a part of our everyday life.

For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God- not the result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

Our ability to believe comes by faith- through inspiration, through God's grace and through our desire to take in that which God has revealed to us as a larger body and to us as individuals. ***Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1***

So, what is it you believe, that you "feel sure of the truth of"? What is it you commit your life to? We often hear "Actions speak louder than words." What do your actions tell others about what you believe? Questions like these are not to scold or to induce guilt, etc., but rather to help us to continue to grow in our relationship to God and to one another.

Blessings to each of you as together we share Jesus Christ for Life, albeit in a different way!

Pr. Amy



To everyone who has helped Zion continue to provide ministry while we haven't been able to meet in person.



Current: Robert & Lois Dowd, Jon Perkins, Elizabeth Schilling, Linda Rager Hampton, George Killian & family, Clayton Marcum, and Jayden Plotner

Ongoing: Peggy Gilbert, Barbara & Dan Speicher, Mara Joy Nelson, Owen Vannoster & his family, and Pastor Judy

Homebound: Marie Betten-Niccum, Bo & Joanne Boettcher, Nancy Coble, John Gaerte, Betty Hamlin, Ruth Hauser, Betty Lawrenz, and Vada Lee Nixon



July Birthdays

- 3 Jack Williams
- Paige Spratt
- 7 Ben Kambs
- 14 Evan Perkins
- 21 Janet McKinley
- 23 Carol Miller
- 24 Marcia Cole
- 26 Erin Working
- 27 Jane Ann Airgood
- 28 Pastor Amy Beitelschees-Albers
- 30 Deb Vineyard



July Baptisms

- 4 Darrel Yankey
- 9 Mara Nelson
- 15 Carol Miller
- 16 Ben Kambs
- 17 Linda Hampton
- 20 Ben Vineyard
- 23 Leah Grant
- 28 Denise Rohrer
- 29 Amy Neild



July Anniversaries

- 7 Zach & Kira Hawkins
- 12 David & Amy Neild





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