

St. Thomas Lutheran Church News

June 2020

XXXXII Issue 6



Pastor's Column...

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

As I watched the evening news, I began to feel completely overwhelmed by the sorrow from all the violence that I saw. And I kept wondering who was in charge now? Who could speak a word of reason and bring order out of this hellish chaos? Given the opposite of leadership coming from the one currently occupying the White House, however, I was hard pressed to find much solace in my search.

Then I began to weep.

I wept for all of the pain that surrounds us on all sides. I wept because I want to help but I don't know what to do so much of the time, yet I know that there is much that needs to be done. I wept because I am a sinner and keep coming up short in so many ways. I weep because I keep making this about me.

And yet there must be a word to speak at times like these, there must be a word I could find from God's word, from the wisdom of the ages, that I could apply to this bleeding wound that could bring healing, even if I had no words of my own to offer.

Then I remembered a phrase from a Eucharistic prayer that almost always moves me to tears.

you show us a vision of a tree of life

with fruits for all and leaves that heal the nations.

It is these healing leaves that I crave right now. How do we bring healing to wounds that run so deep, whose roots run to our nation's origins, wounds that that were watered by the blood of Abel crying out from the earth?

The cry that goes out from the oppressed in our midst is righteous. The system is rigged against many and, as we read in the prophets, this is not pleasing to God.

There is much work to do, sisters and brothers, and we have been commissioned by Christ himself to proclaim the message of repentance and forgiveness, the message of reconciliation in Christ. So much of this work is the very work that you already do so well, St. Thomas. But we will need to step up our game and do so for the long haul, because these traumatic times are not leaving us any time soon.

I also want to remind you of one of the foundational hymns of our Lutheran heritage. *Let this world's tyrants rage. In battle we'll engage.* The problem, as laid out in the first verse, is that the old satanic foe has no

equal on earth. In other words, we got nothing when it comes to sin. We've met our match.

But we are people of hope and we know that God has, in fact, raised up for us a Savior. This is the one little Word that undoes the evil one. It is Jesus Christ, God's incarnate word who lay down his life for the sin of the world, in whom we trust. God has decided that the most powerful thing ever is the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world. And now ours is the ministry of reconciliation.

Along the way, however, please allow yourself the grace to feel that your heart is broken. How could it not be? Broken is a hard place to be and it has always been the sacrifice God has longed for. Psalm 51 tells us that *"the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."* Your broken state is a pleasing thing to Jesus. That he can work with. Let it be.

We must die to so much, those of us with white skin, those of us who have benefitted from the world as it is. And we have done so without ever giving thanks, so unaware we were of the blessings the powers and principalities had bestowed upon us. We must die to all of this and that will be hard to do.

And that is not all that is true. We shall awaken to a better way of being in this world as the body of Christ. That is the promise of the book of Revelation. The life that we are being resurrected into is the one that we were always made to abide in. This is the life that is eternal.

Let us not forget the final verse of that great hymn: *God's Word forever shall abide, no thanks to foes who fear it; for God himself fights by our side with weapons of the Spirit. Were they to take our house, goods, honor, child or spouse, though life be wrenched away, they cannot win the day. The kingdom's ours forever.*

Pastor Darby



The Lutheran Campus Ministry (LuMin) Board at Indiana University is pleased to share the news that Pastor Amanda Ghaffarian has been called by the Indiana-Kentucky Synod to serve as the Director of Campus Ministry. Pastor Amanda has most recently served in the Northwestern Ohio Synod where she was the Minister of Word and Sacrament for a congregation in Metamora, OH. She has a family connection to Indiana and also graduated from Valparaiso University, where she double majored in Geography and Theology, before earning her Master of Divinity from Wartburg Theological Seminary and MBA from Bowling Green State University.

Pastor Amanda describes her favorite parts of ministry being when she is invited into the chaos, craziness, and joys of people's everyday lives. Hearing their stories helps her to understand them better and help them make connections in seeing where God is at work. This approach to ministry is a beautiful match for supporting college-age students in their faith journey or journey to faith. The Board was excited to learn of Pastor Amanda's passion for working with students and many ideas for promoting LuMin's mission and call for the future.

Pastor Amanda and her husband, Chris, will be moving to Bloomington in June and she looks forward to meeting and partnering with everyone at St. Thomas.

NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS

At the May 31 Annual Program Meeting of the Congregation, three new council members were elected. They are: Drew Watters, Amy Bartleson Balcam, and Kari Esarey. Amy's term will begin in July when she is no longer on staff.

New officers are: Dean Arnold, president; Frank Nierzwicki, vice-president; Tom Sinn, secretary.

Remaining council members are: Judy Bush, Liz Gaskins, Gretchen Moehlmann, Dawn Bakken, Ronna Papesh, and Tim Smith.

We thank Cindy Gallien, Sam Eichmiller, and Ashley Ahlbrand for their service on council the past three years.



An Update from the Call Committee

Since the activation of the Ministry Site Profile on the ELCA website, the call committee has started receiving pastoral candidate names from the Synod along with their individual Rostered Minister Profiles. We are actively arranging interviews and as you might assume, these will be done through Zoom video conferencing at this time.

As representatives of the St. Thomas congregation entering this part of the call process, we humbly ask for your continued prayerful support. Thank you.

Haley Garl Hatton
Sacha Arterberry
Liz Gaskins

Peter Iversen
Gayl Laughman
Lindsey Smith

A Letter from Bishop Bill Gafkjen, May 22, 2020

Dear People of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod,

Today President Trump called upon state governors “to allow our churches and places of worship to open right now.” This has led to some confusion on the part of worshippers across the country and, in some cases, the expectation on the part of some church members that their congregation will have in-person worship this Memorial Day weekend. Please feel free to share this communication from me with the members of your community of faith if you think it will be helpful.

In light of what President Trump said today, I am writing to reassert my earlier recommendation to the people and communities of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod that in-person gatherings for worship continue to be suspended, at least into June and probably longer.

As I said in previous communication, the church does not need to re-open. The church – the body of Christ – has been open and working all along. Most of the congregations and other ministries of this synod have continued to engage in active proclamation of the Word, fellowship, faith formation, and service to and with

the neighbor throughout this wilderness, albeit in different ways. We can continue to engage these ministries for as long as we need to, even as we begin to plan to gather in-person and in new ways when it is safer and we are better prepared to protect God's beloved. Yes, the ministries of the body of Christ are "essential services," but we don't need to sit in a sanctuary to experience and share them.

"All things are lawful,' but not all things are beneficial. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other" (1 Corinthians 10:23-24). While something like gathering in-person for worship might be "lawful", that does not mean we should necessarily do it. Rather, we are called to keep our focus on doing what is beneficial, what builds up, and what addresses not only our own needs and well-being, but the needs and well-being of others.

"For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:13f).

We are not only freed from enslaving powers and attempts to appease God, but we are freed for bearing Christ's love to the neighbor. Freedom in Christ empowers self-giving love and service to others and to the world...especially at times like this.

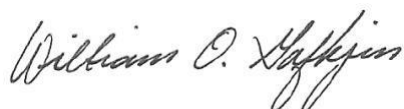
I know that it's not easy to stay at a distance from siblings in Christ. It's incredibly difficult for many of us to not be worshipping together in person. It's incredibly hard for me, too. I long to be in the physical presence of congregations, leaders and ministries, to gather in person with groups of deacons and pastors, to preach and preside in person, to pass the peace, to share a cup of coffee in the narthex, to laugh and pray and wonder and weep together.

But we who bear the mark of the cross of the crucified and risen Christ on our brow and the seal of his Spirit on our hearts have a particular call: to let cross-formed love for our neighbor take precedence over the urge to satisfy our own needs and desires, as appropriate or well-intentioned as they may be. And we, of all people, can be patient in caring for ourselves and our neighbors. We know that God is at work, just as God was at work in and through the cross and empty tomb.

In an early treatise entitled "On the Good of Patience," Bishop Cyprian suggested that when Christians entrust themselves to the patient God, who steadfastly and persistently continues to work hope, healing, and reconciliation in the world, and live patiently with themselves and others, they shine with the light of Christ in ways that both run against the impatience of the cultures in which they live and draw others toward Christ.

May God give us such patience and peace now and in the days ahead.

Peace be with you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William O. Gafkjen".

The Rev. Dr. William O. Gafkjen, Bishop

St. Thomas COVID-19 Taskforce

The St. Thomas COVID-19 Task Force was formed by the executive council and met for the first time on May 20, 2020. It spent the first meeting focusing on its understanding of the task force mission, discussing documents from the I-K Synod Office, Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH), CDC, as well as video resources and sharing personal experiences and concerns. Based upon the research and discussion the task force members unanimously agreed that there is much for St. Thomas to consider in preparation for re-opening the church at some point in the future.

On May 28 the Task Force proposed to Council that St. Thomas adopt a phased approach to the resumption of activities at St. Thomas. It proposed that St. Thomas gradually resume activities through three distinct phases. Phase 1 involves no in-person activities. Phase 2 would allow for small group gatherings such as committees, prayer groups, etc. with appropriate safety protocols in place. Phase 3 would include near normal church activities with strong safety protocols in place. The task force members believe St. Thomas is currently in Phase 1 and after thorough discussion, especially among the staff members who serve on the task force, it was recommended that the church would not be prepared to enter Phase 2 until June 30, 2020, at the earliest.

The task force also recommended that St. Thomas continue its innovative virtual services and activities not only during Phase 1 but throughout all phases going forward.

The task force decision-making has been informed by our commitment to significant guiding values. These values include health & safety, phasing, and effectiveness. We value the health of our congregation and staff, the wellbeing of our community, and risks to vulnerable populations in our re-opening decisions. We will re-introduce the ministries of St. Thomas through gradual phases evaluating the success of each phase before moving to the next. We want to use this opportunity to improve the effectiveness of St. Thomas' ministries through continued innovation as well as a return to its traditional approaches.

The task force will continue to meet weekly. We ask for patience, wisdom, and prayers from everyone.

COVID-19 Task Force Members: Bruce Colston, Susan Krieg, Pastor Darby Lawrence, Gretchen Moehlmann, Mike Powell, Debbie Selk

Submitted by
Frank Nierzwicki, COVID-19 Task Force Chair

Worship Services

You may go directly to YouTube and search for St Thomas Lutheran Church Bloomington. The Sunday services are also available via links on our website and on our Facebook page. On the St. Thomas website look for "Videos for Worshipping in Place" located on the right-hand side of the home page. From there you will find links to all the YouTube videos that we have done since March 22.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND YOUTH GROUP

Youth Group

The youth group will continue to meet via Zoom on Fridays at 2:30 pm, through the end of June! Contact Amy Balcam for more information

Sunday School

Remember to check out the Indiana-Kentucky Synod's **Sunday School @ Home** resources:

<https://iksynod.org/sunday-school-home/>.

Adult Forum

In what ways are you nurturing your spiritual growth during this time? We would love to hear what you are doing for personal devotions, prayer time, bible study, etc.! Also, check out the ELCA's resources on bible study: <https://elca.org/Resources/Bible-Studies>.

MISSION & MINISTRY NEWS

St. Thomas Mission Endowment Fund Call for Fourth Quarter Proposals:

The Mission Endowment Fund provides funding for special projects at St. Thomas Lutheran Church, local outreach, and missions beyond the local community. If you have a project in need of funding, please submit an application before July 31st. Application forms can be emailed. If you have questions, please contact the church office or Keith Knipstein (kknipstein@gmail.com), Chair of the Mission Endowment Fund Committee.

From Nathan Pratt, St. T member and seminarian:

Greetings from Philadelphia! When I started here at United Lutheran Seminary in the fall, I could never have imagined that a global pandemic would so significantly alter my educational experience. But it has been a fruitful year nonetheless: I've completed coursework in biblical Greek, biblical history and geography, systematic theology, liturgical leadership, church history, Eucharistic theology and practice, spiritual formation, Old Testament studies, pastoral caregiving, and the Lutheran Confessions.

In the midst of the global pandemic, I've been well cared for by the entire community here, from instructors moving coursework entirely online to administrators ensuring that public health and safety is prioritized on campus. And as the whole church has had to explore new ways of ministry across physical distance, I've learned so much about the power of the Holy Spirit to bind us together, the grace of our Lord Jesus to sustain us each day, and the love of God for all God's people.

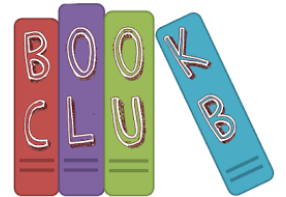
Sierra and I wish that we could visit Bloomington and see everyone again, but it will likely be a long while before we can safely travel. In the meantime, know that our prayers are with you at St Thomas, and we are thankful for your prayers and support as well. Surely, God is with us.



If you are physically unable to grow your own food, are in need, and would like to receive fresh produce from St. Thomas gardeners, please contact the church office.

Mission Committee Book Club Virtual Meeting: June 22, 7 p.m.

In the past few years, the Mission Committee has sponsored several small group meetings to read and discuss books on a variety of issues. This month, as so many Christians struggle to understand how to be God’s hands in a world beset by the sin of racism, we are sponsoring a virtual discussion of Ibram X. Kendi’s book *How to Be an Antiracist*. Please join us in a Zoom meeting on Monday, June 22, at 7 p.m. Discussion questions will be available the week before the meeting; please email Amy Balcam or Dawn Bakken for a copy and for instructions on how to join the meeting.



Cuddle time at The Nest

NEW HOPE FOR FAMILIES

New Hope for Families (the only family emergency housing recovery agency for families in the greater Monroe County area)

The homeless families in our community are especially vulnerable during this global pandemic. Your donations to New Hope for Families are making a difference! To donate items for their immediate needs, please refer to the list provided each week in the St. Thomas Weekly. Alternatively, a monetary contribution can be mailed to St. Thomas with "New Hope for Families" in the memo line. Grateful for the generosity and compassion of this congregation!



Nap time at The Nest

The following is an information letter written to our congregation by Thom Atkinson, Development Assistant at New Hope for Families:

Since opening our doors in 2011, New Hope for Families has sheltered more than 200 families, and assisted many others with access to quality childcare and other essential services. Now, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have more than doubled the number of families for whom we are providing shelter. Here are some things families currently receiving assistance from New Hope have to say:

“My first time being homeless and it’s definitely not easy. Before New Hope, we were sleeping in the car and struggling to pay for a motel. I’m so grateful for their help to get a place for my family. I want to say thank you to New Hope so much for helping people in need! I appreciate everything they do for me and my kids.” – A.J., 24, mother of 2

“New Hope has been awesome for my family! I have been helped with housing, and food, and been provided with assistance and the resources to regain independence. New Hope has given me the feeling of stability and the will to keep pushing forward.” – S.W., 28, mother of 2

“New Hope has made me and my family feel safe and secure. We don’t have to worry or have stress on our shoulders. Also, New Hope supports our needs with good communication and case management.” – K.P., 29, mother of 3

We are so happy to be able to help these families in their time of greatest need. More than 83% of New Hope families move on to stable, secure housing and we are working hard to increase that amount. This important work is only possible through the generous support of our community and friends like you. Thank you for all the ways you contribute, both through your prayers and donations.

Thom Atkinson

Development Assistant, New Hope for Families

MONROE COUNTY UNITED MINISTRIES

NEW ALTERNATIVE DONATION PROCEDURE: for those who would like to drop off Pantry donations at MCUM, they are located at 827 W. 14th Court, next to Mills Pool and Tri-North Middle School. Hours are Monday through Friday 10:00 – 3:00.

- Pull into the MCUM Administration Building parking lot
- As you face the building, go to the door at the right end of the building
- Call the phone # posted on the door
- Someone will come and take your blessed donation
- Be sure to state that it is from St. Thomas

You are also welcome to let Susan Krieg know that you have a pantry donation. Since the St. Thomas building is closed right now, she will arrange to receive it at St. Thomas or pick it up at your home.

Monetary donations can be made to St. Thomas with "MCUM" in the memo line.

FINALLY...Thank you for all you do for MCUM.

Sincerely,

Helen Ingersoll

St. Thomas Representative