



September 2019

the  
**SPIRIT**

# Salem Lutheran Church

shalom - salaam - salem - peace

*A Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Congregation*

## TALKING THE TALK, WALKING THE WALK

*"So we are always confident...for we walk by faith, not by sight." [2 Corinthians 5.6-7]*

Last Sunday I asked folks why they were there and the answers were pretty much what you would expect - "to worship", "to give thanks", "to pray together", and "It's Sunday! Where else would I be?!"

As I have continued to reflect on that question this week, I've realized that perhaps the biggest reason I need to attend worship is to have my faith strengthened.

We talk a lot about faith at church. I mean, it's kind of what it's all about, right? But talking about faith, and walking in faith are two very different things.

In Hebrews we read, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." [Hebrews 11:1] The author goes on to talk about the faith of Abel, Enoch, and Noah, the faith of Abraham and Moses, and the faith of many other Biblical characters.

But that's the thing: they're Biblical characters and when we read the stories it's hard to believe that they are real. It's hard to believe that Abraham left his homeland and set out for the promised land when he was 75 years old. It's hard to believe that he still longed for a child at age 99. It's hard to believe that he was up for leaving his past behind and setting out on a brand new adventure to follow God by faith into an unknown future.

It's much easier to stick with what we know, to stay within our comfort zone, to keep doing the things we've been doing. But the truth is: the only way we can receive what

God promises, the only way we can live the dream God has for us, the only way we can fulfill the purposes God has for us, is by following - in faith - where God leads.

Now that does not mean that if we go in a new direction, we are necessarily following God. There are unlimited paths that we can

take, and not all of those will lead us where God wants us to go.

So how do we know where God is leading? We pray. We ask God to guide us. We watch and wait and listen for God to give us direction. And we ask ourselves questions like: What is the deepest desire of my heart? If I had no fear, what would I do? What is it that God wants me to accomplish?

And then, once we know where our desires and God's desires for us meet, we have a destination, and then we just need the faith and the courage to set out to reach it.

That's why I go to worship - to be reminded that God is faithful and I don't have to be afraid to face an unknown future because God is right there, leading me and guiding me along the way.

In the past week, 3 of my Christian friends have shared words that have strengthened my faith, and I'd like to pass them on to you:

*"Today is not the continuation of your yesterday, but the beginning of your tomorrow."*

*"Never give up trusting for the longings that God has placed within you. These unmet desires are often the most potent devices God uses to make you more god-like. 'The One who called you is faithful, and will do it.'"*

*"God doesn't plant hopes and dreams in our minds for no reason...God waits for us to ask so God can fulfill the desires God has placed on our hearts. Especially when the fulfillment brings praise and glory to God."*

That's why we come to worship. To be reminded of God's faithfulness. To be reminded of God's power. To be reminded of God's love. For when we're reminded - through the reading of scripture, through preaching, and through the witness of other believers - of who God is and who we are to God, then we can do more than talk the talk, we can walk the walk of faith.

Abundant blessings be yours!

**Pastor Marjo**

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*We are a community of Christian disciples called by the Holy Spirit.  
In response to God's transforming love, we share our JOY through praise and service.*

## SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

3160 Park Avenue  
Bridgeport, Connecticut 06604  
Phone (203) 336-3300 ▪ Fax (203) 336-8813

Website - [www.salembridgeport.org](http://www.salembridgeport.org)

Facebook - [www.facebook.com/SalemBridgeport/](http://www.facebook.com/SalemBridgeport/)

### Church Office Hours

Monday to Friday 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

### Worship Services

9:30am Traditional Worship

4:30pm SNAC

Sunday Night Alive Dinner Church

### Salem's Staff

The Rev. Marjo Anderson, Pastor  
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Jennifer Reyes, Sexton  
Pablo, Cruz, Sexton  
Office Phone (203) 336-3300, ext. 10

## LEADERSHIP AT SALEM

### COUNCIL

Marjo Anderson, Pastor – [marjoanderson@aol.com](mailto:marjoanderson@aol.com)  
Frank Dukenski, President – [fdukeniski@aol.com](mailto:fdukeniski@aol.com)  
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Bill Winter, Property – [wjwinter@optonline.net](mailto:wjwinter@optonline.net)

### SUSTAINABILITY TASK FORCE

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### LIGHT –

Leaders Inviting Growth through Hope for Tomorrow

### Source Team:

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**Newsletter deadline is the 15th of each month  
unless otherwise noted in the monthly  
calendar.**

**Next deadline date is **September 15th** for the  
**October issue!****




**Email submissions to  
[salemsec123@sbcglobal.net](mailto:salemsec123@sbcglobal.net)**



# September 2019

## Salem Lutheran Church



SUN Sep 1	MON 2	TUE 3	WED 4	THU 5	FRI 6	SAT 7
<b>Pentecost 12</b> 9:30am Worship 10:30am Coffee Hour 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 12:30pm New Directions Ministries 6:30pm SLAA - CR	<b>Labor Day - Office Closed</b>	9:30am Pastors' Text Study 12pm Book Club 7pm Forward Leadership 7pm STEPP Group - CR	10am Culinary Class			
8 <b>Pentecost 13</b> 9:30am Worship 10:30am Coffee Hour 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 12:30pm New Directions Ministries 4:30pm Unity Worship & Picnic 6:30pm SLAA - CR	9 10am Culinary Class 6:30pm Social Ministry	10 9:30am Pastors' Text Study 10am Culinary Class 6pm Stewardship 7pm STEPP Group - CR	11 8:30am Pantry Setup 10am Culinary Class	12 8:30am Pantry Setup 10am Culinary Class 4pm Food Pantry	13	14 8am Men's Breakfast
15 <b>Pentecost 14</b> 9:30am Worship 10:30am Coffee Hour 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 12:30pm New Directions Ministries 6:30pm SLAA - CR	16 10am Culinary Class 6:30pm Finance Committee 7:30pm Executive Committee	17 9:30am Pastors' Text Study 10am Culinary Class 7pm STEPP Group - CR 7:30pm Talk Tuesdays at Brewport	18 <b>Golden Hill Community Supper</b> 9:30am Bible Study 10am Culinary Class	19 10am Culinary Class	20 6:30pm Sustainability Potluck	21 8:30am CPC Fall Kids Event 11am Inner-View Chat n Chew
22 <b>Pentecost 15</b> 9:30am Worship 10:30am Coffee Hour 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 12:30pm New Directions Ministries 6:30pm SLAA - CR	23 10am Culinary Class 7pm Council	24 9:30am Pastors' Text Study 10am Culinary Class 7pm STEPP Group - CR	25 8:30am Pantry Setup 9:30am Bible Study 10am Culinary Class	26 8:30am Pantry Setup 10am Culinary Class 4pm Food Pantry	27	28
29 <b>Pentecost 16</b> 9:30am Worship 10:30am Coffee Hour 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 12:30pm New Directions Ministries 6:30pm SLAA - CR	30 10am Culinary Class	<div>    </div>				



# Worship Assistants

## SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

September, 2019

	Sep 1	Sep 8	Sep 15	Sep 22	Sep 29
<b>Assisting Minister</b>	Anita Papp				
<b>Lector/Communion Minister</b>	Sandra Brown				
<b>Altar Prep Team</b>	Jean Larson Diane Tomasko	Jean Larson Diane Tomasko	Anita Papp Cindy Roberts	Anita Papp Cindy Roberts	Bob Reichelt Chris Wolff
<b>Ushers</b>	Ray & Eileen Anderson	Mike Caragol Tom Larson	Joe Bales John Bryk	Rich & Carol Lansing	Ray & Eileen Anderson
<b>Flowers Given By</b>	Cindy Matusovich			Joan Crossman	
<b>Coffee Hour</b>			Food Pantry		
<b>Tellers</b>	Rich Kenyon Diane Tomasko	Liz Bales Frank Dukenski	Steve Kuczo Bill Winter	Ray Anderson Dale Danowski	Emily Sokoloski Tracey Wilkins



Calling all coffee hour hosts. PLEASE contact the church office to secure a date for coffee hour. Coffee hour is a wonderful tradition at Salem. It gives all of us a chance for fellowship among our members. Thank you for your continued support. Contact the office at (203) 336-3300, or email [salemsec123@sbcglobal.net](mailto:salemsec123@sbcglobal.net).

Nancy Sidoti .....	2
Bennett Guadagno .....	2
Dennis Norberg .....	3
Emily Sokoloski .....	8
Richard Kenyon .....	9
Eileen Anderson .....	11
Al DeWalt .....	12
Thomas Larson .....	15
Peter Mavilla .....	17
Ashley Rosa .....	21
Susan Molnar .....	22
Jenna Llanos .....	22
Dorothy Schrum .....	23
Kyle DeWalt .....	24
Olivia Mavilla .....	24
Kim Lange .....	25
Carol Mavilla .....	26
Stephanie Schott .....	26
Jennifer Reyes .....	29
Samantha Baronavski .....	30



2019  
Blood Pressure  
Screening Dates

Sep 8    Nov 10  
Oct 13    Dec 8

On Friday, September 20, 2019, at 6:30 PM, there will be a potluck supper at Salem with additional opportunity to discuss the report of the Sustainability Taskforce. Anyone with questions, comments, or suggestions is urged to attend.

**Salem Book Club** meets on the first Tuesday at noon in the Salem Lounge. Fall discussions will be: Sept. 3<sup>rd</sup> - **Left Neglected** by Lisa Genova; Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> - **The Girl Who Wrote in Silk** by Kelly Estes; Nov. 5<sup>th</sup> - **Where the Crawdads Sing** by Delia Owens. New members and guests are welcome. Please bring your lunch



The following people have asked for healing, help, guidance or comfort.


Joan B	Daphne B
Marge S	Peter K
Barbara B	Bobby W
Sam B	Anna
Erick D	Barbara
Grace D	James S
Hannah & Joseph	Sarah R
Bob H	Brooks A
Dennis H	Angie
Sylvitha	Liz F.
Jay	Hazel P
Jinny L	
Derm L	
Mike R	
Jane M	
Jana B	
William S	



You're invited to a

# Food Pantry Celebration & Fundraiser

Salem Lutheran Church Food Pantry  
celebrates its 4<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Come and join  
us for Dinner, Dancing and Live  
Entertainment



**Salem Lutheran Church**

**Social Hall**

**October 19<sup>th</sup> @ 6 PM ~ \$35**

*3160 Park Ave, Bridgeport, CT*

*For Tickets see Tom Larson, Joe Bales,*

*Roberta Bellows or Ray Anderson*

# We Are Grateful

## Capital Improvements

Marjo Anderson, Judi Nielsen

## Food Pantry

Marjo Anderson, Sandra Brown, Nancy & Domenick D'Andrea,  
Ian & Suzanne Dow, Barbara Howard, Cliff LaRose,

Joe & Liz Bales, Alan & Judy Goldbecker, Ron & Charlotte Schlegel (in honor of Cary Andren's birthday)

## Memorial Donations

Sandra Brown (in memory of George Hassinger)

## Outreach Ministry

Marjo Anderson, Sue & Tony Kowalski, Tom & Jean Larson

## Thrivent Choice Dollars

Al & Dot DeWalt,



To Salem Lutheran Church,  
Thank you so much for  
sharing your dear Pastor Marjo  
with us to officiate at our daughter,  
Katie's wedding on  
6/13/19.  
You are so lucky  
to have Pastor Marjo in your  
midst. We too, have experienced  
having Pastor Marjo when she was  
at Tabor Lutheran Church  
prior to coming to Salem. Her  
unconditional love & services  
touches many and has a  
lasting effect always!  
So in celebration  
of our daughter's  
marriage,  
we wanted  
to spread  
the love

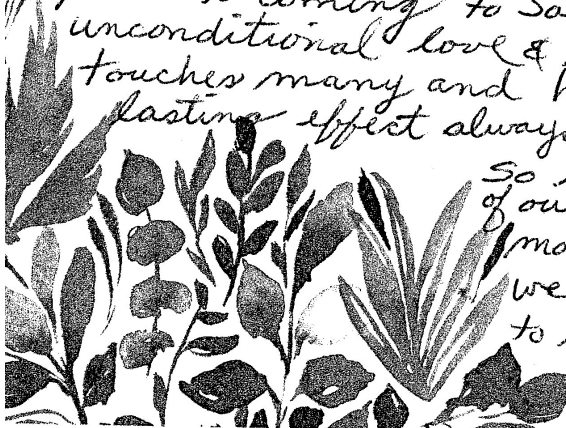
July  
2019



With  
gratitude

{thank you}  
and we thought Salem would  
be the perfect place! So  
here's a little gift for  
your Church - Use it  
wherever it makes the  
best impact!

Sincerely,  
Sue & Tony Kowalski



# Get Your Flu Shot

Protect ourselves and others by:

- Regular Hand-washing
- Covering our mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing
- Staying home if sick
- Getting vaccinated with the flu vaccine

You should receive a flu vaccination even if you are healthy, because you can transfer the virus to others.

Flu can lead to bronchitis, pneumonia, and blood infections. Each year thousands of people in the United States die from flu. Therefore, get vaccinated. Ask your doctor about what type of flu vaccine is right for you. It takes about 2 weeks for protection to develop after vaccination and protection lasts through the flu season.

Information is from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)



## Food Safety at the Farmer's Market

Shopping at a farmer's market is a great way to get locally-grown, fresh fruit, vegetables, and other foods for you and your family.

As these markets have grown more popular, there have been questions about the safety of the foods purchased there. There are some basic guidelines that you should follow to ensure that the farm-fresh food is safe.

Before and after preparing fresh produce, wash your hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap. Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly under running water just before eating, cutting or cooking. We don't recommend washing fruits and vegetables with soap or detergent or using commercial produce washes.

Even if you plan to peel the produce before eating, it is still important to wash it first. Any bacteria present on the outside of items like melons can be transferred to the inside when you cut or peel them. Be sure to refrigerate cut or peeled fruits and vegetables within two hours after preparation.

There is a list of Farmers' Markets in the Bridgeport area on the Parish Nurse bulletin board in the hallway outside of the lounge.

Health Tips from FoodSafety.Gov

# Be prepared

It's important to prepare for disasters and everyday emergencies that can happen at any time. Here are some tips to be prepared for an emergency.

Basic supplies for a preparedness kit:

- ☐ Water—one gallon per person, per day
- ☐ Food—non-perishable items (3-day supply)
- ☐ Flashlight
- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Medications (7-day supply)
- ☐ Battery-powered or hand-crank radio
- ☐ Sanitation and personal hygiene items
- ☐ Emergency blankets
- ☐ Copies of personal documents
- ☐ Cell phone with chargers
- ☐ Extra cash

Consider needs of all family members:

- ☐ Medical supplies
- ☐ Baby supplies
- ☐ Pet supplies
- ☐ Hearing aids with extra batteries

Make a plan with your loved ones in case of an emergency:

- ☐ Install smoke alarms on every level of your home
- ☐ Make and share a home fire escape plan
- ☐ Choose two places to meet outside your home



# 2019 ELCA CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY

AUGUST 5-10, 2019 • MILWAUKEE

Our denomination, the ELCA, holds a churchwide assembly triennially - to worship, vote on matters of governance and policy, and be church together for the sake of the world. The 2019 churchwide assembly was full of important votes and actions, including:

- Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton was reelected for a second six-year term on the first ballot.
- A declaration of apology to our siblings of African descent, which was received by the African Descent Lutheran Association with thanks and a call for accountability and living into the words shared.
- Approved resolution declaring the ELCA is a “sanctuary church body,” encouraging participation in the ELCA AMMPARO initiative for migrant children, discernment of care for our immigrant neighbors in our context, and the promise of forthcoming resources for this work.
- Approved support for the World Council of Church’s *Thursdays in Black*, awareness movement for a world without rape and violence.
- Voted to commemorate June 17 as a day of repentance, in honor and remembrance of the martyrdom of the Emanuel 9.
- Approved a declaration for inter-religious commitment, reaffirming ecumenical and inter-faith partnerships.
- Approved the recommendations from a strategic taskforce which has been studying how to work toward authentic diversity in our church.
- Approved memorials: affirming but not “endorsing” the Poor People’s Campaign, care for immigrants and refugees, and other statements.
- Adopted a new social statement, “Faith, Sexism, and Justice: a Lutheran Call to Action,” and its implementing resolutions.
- Deacon Sue Rothmeyer was elected Churchwide Secretary, a full-time position which acts as executive administrator and leader on all constitutional matters and interpretation.
- Constitutional change for Deacons (rostered ministers of word and service) to be ordained, from the previous practice of consecration.
- Celebrated the milestones of 50 years of women's ordination, 40 years since the first woman of color was ordained, and 10 years since full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ clergy.

## One Congregation's Journey in Faith

*On July 19<sup>th</sup>, Tom Larson, Bill Winter, Jeanette Harris and Pastor Anderson toured a building that will soon be the new home of New Vision International Ministries.*

*The congregation wasn't looking for a new building, but it seemed that God was.*

*They had no money for the building – but they put an offer in on it –  
and between the owner financing it, members stepping up to give, and God's GRACE,  
they were able to purchase it.*

*It wasn't zoned for a church, but they bought it anyway,  
and once again God was faithful and they got the zoning.*

*Every step along the way has been a step in faith.*

*And because they're walking in faith, God is doing amazing things for them and through them.*

*Below are some pictures and a description of our tour.*



Eric Calhoun started a church in Norwalk and relocated to Bridgeport 16 years ago. They were located in the Warnaco building in approximately 16,000 square feet of space. That was adapted office space and they made one large room for their sanctuary by knocking down some walls but they fit their programs into the rest of the building as it was.

In February 2018 Pastor Dexter B. Upshaw, Jr. (BA, Yale, '06) was contacted by a commercial real estate agent about the property at 35? Benham Street (bounded by Wood and ?). They had not been actively looking to purchase a building and frankly didn't have the financing, but they went to look at it anyway. As soon as they saw at

their jaws dropped and Pastor Dexter called his bishop who came up from Florida.

They worked all last year to negotiate and obtain the building. The key components that allowed them to purchase it were: 1. God's grace, and 2. the seller financed the building (for now, although they plan on later refinancing with a bank to get a better long-term rate). This was a win for the seller since he didn't have to subdivide to make condos or anything. They decided to purchase in March of 2018 and then had to raise funds for the initial due diligence to make sure the building was structurally sound. This work was done from April to July.

Pastor Dexter created the initial plan for planning and zoning on his computer. They tore his plan to pieces so they hired an architect to insure compliance. They missed the October and November zoning dates and the commission doesn't meet in December, but they closed on January 15, 2019 and have been working on construction every day since. They actually purchased the building BEFORE they had zoning approval. The site is in a residential zone that includes institutions and light manufacturing (1 of their tenants). Eventually they got it zoned for "religious use by special permit".

They purchased the building for 1.58 million and are spending about 500K on rehabbing it. Cost is kept low because Pastor Dexter is serving as the general contractor (had no clue what one was when he started - he's also lead social worker and lead counselor), volunteers contribute elbow grease, members (like a carpenter) work at discounted rates, vendors within community have given discounts, and much of the stuff (tile, office furniture, etc) has been donated, recycled, and reclaimed.

The original building is over 100 years old but includes 3 additions made at various times. The roof was put on during the construction of the last addition in the 1970s. The building had been well-maintained.



It currently houses 4 commercial tenants on the first floor. They have two larger tenants with long-term leases and two month-to-month tenants that pay smaller amounts. In total their rental income amounts to \$13,000/month.

It's hard to find a building in Bridgeport that doesn't have columns every 3 to 5 feet, but the second floor was completely open space with only eight supporting columns and now houses the church in 25,000 ft.<sup>2</sup> - ideal for a sanctuary and children's area

Even though the church is on the second floor, because the building is set on a hill, the entrance to the church at the rear of the building is on ground level.

The lobby will include an information desk.

The sanctuary with stage will seat 750 people. Currently the congregation's membership is about 1000 plus online participants and their average worship attendance is about 200. They are a regional church with members coming from as far as New Haven, the Valley, and Stamford, but they are anchored in Bridgeport and have a strong contingent from Norwalk where the church was started.



The reasons for the additional 550 seats are that they plan on growing and that they house community events. For instance, they will be hosting Pastor McCullough's city-wide 10 Days of Prayer. The space will be a center or hub for the community. Included in the sanctuary is a cry room with live video feed. With stage lighting and an audio/video system, the sanctuary can also be used for theater and concerts, equipped with wings and a backstage area comprised of a music room, a dance studio, 2 dressing rooms, and a room for prop storage. They hope to get the OK to use the worship space starting the first Sunday in August.

The chapel will serve as an overflow room with video screen, can be rented for weddings, and can house smaller leadership meetings.

The children's area is just for kids and houses children's church during worship with a check-in area and music and video technology. There are also 2 auxiliary classrooms (which can double as ministry meeting rooms) and a dedicated nursery - and the kids can rotate from classroom to classroom to the open children's space. Also included is a bathroom for kids and a dedicated bathroom for the nursery. Currently they have 50-60 kids.

A men's bathroom near the sanctuary includes two toilets and two urinals and a women's bathroom includes five toilets. There's also a family bathroom for those with special needs. A boiler room is near the bathrooms.

From their worship area the building flows into their community and economic development area.

The restaurant area includes a commercial kitchen with 3 ovens, and space for 5 restaurants (previously they served as an incubator to get 2 of their members' food businesses off the ground and they plan to help 3 more).

Outside the 5 restaurant windows there is café seating as in a food court. The restaurants are open after worship so people can enjoy food and fellowship while supporting the businesses of their members. Eventually the restaurants will be open during the week for all of the other people using the space and for the general public.

Next to the café is a co-working & business incubation space with private offices, and a fitness center, and a preventive health and wellness clinic for their members. Previously they have just had blood pressure screenings once a month but now will have a naturopathic doctor, a massage therapist and a nurse practitioner, all members of the congregation.

Their philosophy is to treat people with respect and dignity and so provide a hand up, not a hand out. They emphasize empowerment, not charity, but they do have a person in charge of outreach who refers people to soup kitchens and pantries, helps folks get IDs so they can get jobs, and coordinates their operation fuel program.

Also included in this area is the banquet hall which will seat 200. More bathrooms are located near the hall.

The building flows from worship to community development to the administration area. There's a volunteer hub with three sections – including a conference room for ministry leaders and a technology lab to train leaders on such things as excel spreadsheets and google docs.

The office area was already set up in the building. There will be a pastoral conference room with conference table area and lounge area so that when they have guest pastors they can provide hospitality and serve food. This room will connect with the pastor's office which will connect with his wife's office. There is also a security office/family room for his kids. (Pastor Dexter is a PK and jokes that he was a "drug baby" since he was "drug" to church day in and day out!) The pastoral bathroom includes a shower so he can work 60 to 70 hours/week. There is an office for Karen Briggs who has been their administrative person for 14 years (she answers the phone, manages the pastor's calendar, and serves as volunteer coordinator and building manager) and an office for the founding bishop who comes up quarterly and who has coached pastor Dexter on this project on a daily basis. Additionally there is a finance room and a broadcast room from where they broadcast all of their services on Facebook live and live [stream.com](https://www.twitch.tv/stream) and which can be used as a production studio (complete with green screen wall) for digitizing curriculum (some written by their bishop).

They have two full-time staff on site - Pastor Dexter and Karen Briggs. They have an additional 5 to 7 administrators and musicians on stipends of 500 - 1000 per month. Also they have a worship leader who organizes the praise and worship team, and their band consists of their music director/keyboardist, bassist, drummer, and volunteer guitarist.

They are working with the green bank, had an energy audit, and have energy efficient insulation, smart sensors, and other recommended technology throughout the second floor.

Currently the building is heated by a big in efficient gas boiler. Stage one of their plan includes an HVAC system to cool the sanctuary, chapel and children's area. Stage two will replace the boilers and cool the rest of the building.



# Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

**STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION**

## Bent

A Reflection by Yehiel Curry

In the Gospel for the last Sunday of August ([Luke 13:10-17](#)), Jesus rebukes temple leaders who question him for healing a woman who had endured a bent posture for 18 years.

Jesus challenges their outdated Sabbath theology that appears to treat livestock better than people. In the same manner, I wrestle with an outdated scriptural lens some preachers use with this story that labels this woman as disabled. Although those leaders and some of us in the crowd are probably physically standing upright, our application of Scripture renders us bent.

One January, while waiting at a Chicago train stop, I noticed a former mentee from my prior career as a mental health professional. Once we made eye contact, I could tell by the tilt of his head and the squint of his eyes that he remembered me. We scurried through the maze of bodies entering and exiting the arriving train and cupped our hands around our mouths to holler greetings.

Directly across from us, on the departing train, I noticed an unkempt man in his late 50s. He was holding onto the safety bar at the exit door with one hand. His eyes were closed, and his torso was perpendicular to the floor.

As I watched his body sway, my mentee asserted, "Everybody knows Charlie ... he's on this train every day at the same time. He's family." Although I suspected Charlie was ill, judgment blurred my vision. Before I could say anything, my mentee continued, "Bent." I nodded.

The word "bent" is often associated with being inebriated or impaired due to a controlled substance. My mentee didn't explain further—he didn't have to. Now I noticed the faded army uniform and the hospital sticker above Charlie's heart.

Coincidentally, my involvement with my mentee years ago was spurred by his mother's addiction.

Trying to redirect the conversation, I asked, "How is your mom doing?" He replied, "Clean ... 10 years."

When Charlie's train prepared to leave, my mentee and a couple other voices started calling out his name. Without breaking his posture or opening his eyes, Charlie murmured, "OK," and exited the train.

Whenever we forget that the women in the synagogue and the Charlies of the world are still family, we are the ones who are bent.



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## *Heroes of the Faith*

In Russia, identifying as Lutheran “means to be a minority,” said Dietrich Brauer, archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia (ELCR).

The majority of people are Russian Orthodox or practice Islam, and many consider Lutheranism a sect. “[Being Lutheran] is not always easy. It demands courage,” he said.

Lutherans who kept the faith during the Soviet regime know much about courage. From 1922 to 1991, the government only tolerated religion behind closed doors. Lutheran bishops and pastors were executed or lived in exile. Despite this, Russian Lutherans continued to worship in each other’s homes. “They knew hymns by heart, baptized children and prayed as they could,” Brauer said.



Bradn Buerkle, an ELCA missionary in St. Petersburg, believes faith helped the Lutherans survive that era. “Part of the responsibility of the church [today] is to take care of people who lived through the oppression,” he said. “They were heroes of the faith.”

Today the ELCR has 50,000 members in 300 congregations across Russia. The distances between congregations are huge, and many are without pastors. “The church is very young after being reborn, after having the freedom to develop a public church again starting in the ‘90s,” Buerkle said.

A need for more theological training inspired the church to partner with the ELCA on the Equipping for Service project. Buerkle administers the project; for three years, he has traveled throughout the country to conduct educational and leadership seminars for lay leaders.

Buerkle has seen the strength of lay leadership firsthand. While the 25 members of a congregation in Abakan, south-central Siberia, waited for a new pastor, lay leaders covered preaching, communion and other duties. By the time they called a new pastor, the congregation had grown to 35 people. Now, with a pastoral vacancy again, “the congregation is not so anxious, due in part to their participation in the Equipping for Service project,” Buerkle said. Today it has 50 members.

The ELCR is unique in that “there is no separation between laypeople and pastors. It is a complicated but a crucial point for Russia,” Brauer said. “For the church of the majority, the qualitative difference is very important. Ordination is not a sacrament in our church and there is no class of priests as a social group.”

The empowerment of lay leaders combined with the Lutherans’ strong faith gives Buerkle hope for the future. “When I saw how many great laypeople there were, their circumstances were such that they wouldn’t get to seminary, that’s what helped me to develop this program, seeing the potential that was out there,” he said. “It’s important to say just how committed the lay leaders are here. In the Russian context, you have to be willing to endure great hardships [to be Lutheran].”