



December 2019

the
SPIRIT

Salem Lutheran Church

shalom - salaam - salem - peace

A Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Congregation

GOD'S POSSIBLE FUTURES (THE DREAMING GAME)

On November 10th, 50 voting members (exactly the number needed for a quorum) attended a special congregational meeting to vote to explore the possibility of selling all or part of our property. The resolution passed, 46-4.

So now what happens?

Council, with the support of the Sustainability Task Force and the Forward 2.0 leadership teams, has voted to engage the services of Verse 4, a non-profit corporation whose mission is to help congregations figure out their best options for dealing with property. The Rev. Timothy Stein and Mr. Alan Bascom from Verse 4 met with us in an adult forum last August so many of you met them at that time. Pastor Stein will be coming to Salem, probably some weekend in January, to interview members of the congregation in order to help us develop an RFP or Request for Proposals that will go out to developers, government, and community organizations. In the meantime, please keep in mind the following:

The decision that lays ahead of us must be faith-based. The most important thing to consider is what God wants for Salem. God already knows the best course for us to take. We simply need to discern where God is calling us and to move ahead in that direction in confident faith.

Salem has many options, resources, and time. Salem is actually in a better position than the vast majority of congregations these days, as we have many financial and property resources, many options to organize and use those assets for the good of the church and its mission, and (because of our financial assets) plenty of time.

The property has many parts. We don't have to sell all of our property. The land can be subdivided in many ways (for example, many small lots or a few big ones), if we desire. The sanctuary and the rest of the building might be separated.

The site is desirable. The church is in a great neighborhood. The current lot is large and therefore attractive for all sorts of uses. It is in an urban area. And it is likely we will have many interesting responses to our Request for Proposals.

So now is the time to put on your dreaming and imagining hat! We tried this at our last Forward on the Fourth Adult Forum on 11/24 and folks found it so helpful they urged me to share it with the congregation at large. So if you haven't yet played the **"God's Possible Futures: The Dreaming Game"**, here's your chance! The exercise is designed to get your creative juices flowing, because when we're being creative, we're growing and we're alive, and then there's hope and we can get excited about what God has in mind for us.

So...think about what you would want to do if we had a few million dollars! On the next page you'll find **7 colored strips** that you can print and cut out (or pick up your pre-printed set at church on Sunday or in the office during office hours). **On each strip are 3 potential choices around 1 part of the decision, plus a blank in case you come up with a 4th choice you like better.** The choices deal with mission priorities, possible partners, what we would like in terms of property, building, space, and location, and how we'd like to fund ongoing ministry. Feel free to talk with others about the possibilities. Just remember that **THERE ARE NO WRONG IDEAS! EVERYONE'S OPINION IS VALID, SO CONVERSATIONS ARE NOT ABOUT CHANGING ANYONE'S MIND, SIMPLY ABOUT BEING CURIOUS, RESPECTFUL AND POSITIVE.**

Choose 1 square from each colored strip, clip them together and leave them in the church office, or email your results (via photo or textual description). If you leave your name and email address, we'll email you the final results.

Selling our part or all of our property does not have to be a negative thing. We can be sad and afraid or we can put our trust in God and be excited about this awesome journey on which God is taking us! Our part in the process is twofold:

- * to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and body, and
- * to treat every person we meet as an angel sent to us by God.

If we just do those 2 things, we have absolutely nothing to fear because:

- * our God is all powerful and **can** do absolutely anything, and
- * our God is all loving and **will** do absolutely anything – for those who act in faith.

So turn the page, put on your dreaming hat, and just imagine what God has in mind!

Abundant Blessings Be Yours!

Pastor Marjo

What's Inside

Salem

Calendar
Worship Assistants.....
Birthdays.....
Prayer List.....
Parish Nurse

Wider Church

Faith in Action
Global Links

We are a community of Christian disciples called by the Holy Spirit.

GOD'S POSSIBLE FUTURES (THE DREAMING GAME)

1. Look at the 3 choices on each colored strip and think about the pros and cons of each.
2. Select one of the three choices or write our your own on the blank square, and cut out that square.
3. Assemble your rainbow of choices, 1 of each color and return to the church office, either by dropping off your packet or by emailing your choices (via pix or text)

PRIORITY #1 ENCOUNTER GOD	PRIORITY #1 BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AMONG MEMBERS	PRIORITY #1 CHANGE THE WORLD	
PARTNERS? SALEM ONLY	PARTNERS? SALEM AND PARTNERS WHO ARE LIKE US	PARTNERS? SALEM AND DIVERSE PARTNERS	
SELL WHOLE PROPERTY	SELL LAND BUT KEEP BUILDING	SELL BUILDING BUT KEEP SOME LAND TO BUILD ON	
STAY HERE AT 3160 PARK AV	MOVE BUT STAY NEARBY IN BRIDGEPORT	MOVE TO SUBURBAN TOWN OF _____	
RENT SPACE (HERE OR ELSEWHERE)	BUY AN EXISTING BUILDING	BUILD A NEW BUILDING	
SPACE FOR WORSHIP AND FOOD PANTRY	SPACE FOR WORSHIP AND PROGRAMS FOR MUSIC & YOUTH	SPACE FOR WORSHIP AND _____?	
FUND BY OFFERINGS ONLY	FUND BY OFFERINGS AND ENDOWMENT	FUND BY OFFERINGS AND ALTERNATIVE REVENUE SOURCE LIKE INDOOR FARM	

SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

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

Website - www.salembridgeport.org

Facebook - 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

Salem's Staff

The Rev. Marjo Anderson, Pastor
Cell Phone (203) 982-3441
marjoanderson@aol.com

Sarah Fox, Music Director

Karl Kraft, Office Manager
Office Phone (203) 336-3300
salemsec123@sbcglobal.net

Jennifer Reyes, Sexton
Pablo, Cruz, Sexton
Office Phone (203) 336-3300, ext. 10

LEADERSHIP AT SALEM

COUNCIL

Marjo Anderson, Pastor – marjoanderson@aol.com
Frank Dukenski, President – fduzenski@aol.com
Ray Anderson, Vice-President – andersray4@gmail.com
Nancy Headford, Secretary – nancy9881@att.net
Rich Kenyon, Treasurer – rich@kenyonbusiness.com
Katie Adams – keadams333@gmail.com
Liz Bales – the2bales@gmail.com
Sandra Brown – sjbrown@snet.net
Steve Kuczo, Staff Support – skuczo@aol.com
Evan Lansing
Emily Sokoloski – emilysokoloski@gmail.com
Diane Tomasko – dtomasko01@yahoo.com
Bill Winter, Property – wjwinter@optonline.net

SUSTAINABILITY TASK FORCE

Pastor Marjo Anderson – marjoanderson@aol.com
Frank Dukenski – fduzenski@aol.com
Ray Anderson – andersray4@gmail.com
Liz Bales – the2bales@gmail.com
Sandra Brown – sjbrown@snet.net
John Bryk – jbryk@znclaw.com
Richard Lansing – rlansing@optonline.net
Jean Larson – tjcklarson@sbcglobal.net
Bruce Tomasko – bltomasko@yahoo.com

LIGHT –

Leaders Inviting Growth through Hope for Tomorrow

Source Team:

Pastor Marjo Anderson – marjoanderson@aol.com
Ray Lansing – raylansing@yahoo.com
Bill Winter – wjwinter@optonline.net
Tom Larson – tjcklarson@sbcglobal.net

Reflection Team:

Katie Adams – keadams333@gmail.com
Jean Larson – tjcklarson@sbcglobal.net
Frank Dukenski – fduzenski@aol.com
Joel Hintz – brondle@aol.com

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

Next deadline date is **December 15th for the
January issue!**

**Email submissions to
salemsec123@sbcglobal.net**



December 2019

Salem Lutheran Church



SUN Dec 1	MON 2	TUE 3	WED 4	THU 5	FRI 6	SAT 7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9:30am Worship 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 10:45am Adult Forum 12:30pm New Directions Ministries 6:30pm Sunday Night Alive 6:30pm SLAA - CR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6:30pm Social Ministry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9:30am Pastors' Text Study 12pm Book Club 6pm Stewardship 7pm Talk Tuesdays at Brewport 7pm STEPP Group - CR 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7:30pm Choir 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4pm Musical Theatre Afterschool Camp 6:30pm New Direction Ministries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8:30am CPC Christmas Kids Event
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9:30am Worship 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 10:45am Adult Forum 12:30pm New Directions Ministries 6:30pm Sunday Night Alive 6:30pm SLAA - CR 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9:30am Pastors' Text Study 7pm STEPP Group - CR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8:30am Pantry Setup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8:30am Pantry Setup 4pm Food Pantry 7:30pm Choir 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4pm Musical Theatre Afterschool Camp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8am Men's Breakfast
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9:30am Worship 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 10:45am Adult Forum 12:30pm New Directions Ministries 3pm CPC Twas the Night Concert 6:30pm Sunday Night Alive 6:30pm SLAA - CR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6:30pm Finance Committee 7:30pm Executive Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9:30am Pastors' Text Study 7pm STEPP Group - CR 7:30pm Talk Tuesdays at Brewport 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7:30pm Choir 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4pm Musical Theatre Afterschool Camp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11am Inner-View Chat n Chew
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9:30am Worship 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 10:45am Adult Forum 12:30pm New Directions Ministries 6:30pm SLAA - CR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7pm Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9:30am Pastors' Text Study 3:30pm CPC Christmas Eve Service 5pm Christmas Eve worship 7pm STEPP Group - CR 	<div>Christmas Day</div> <div>OFFICE CLOSED</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7:30pm Choir 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9:30am Worship 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 10:45am Adult Forum 12:30pm New Directions Ministries 6:30pm SLAA - CR 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9:30am Pastors' Text Study 7pm STEPP Group - CR 	<div>Prepare the way of the LORD.</div> <div>ISAIAH 40:3</div>			



Worship Assistants

SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

December 2019

	Dec 1	Dec 8	Dec 15	Dec 22	Dec 24	Dec 29
Assisting Minister	Bruce Tomasko	Steve Kuczo				
Lector/ Communion Minister	Diane Tomasko	Jean Larson				
Altar Prep Team	Bob Reichelt Chris Wolff	Sandra Brown Emily Sokoloski	Sandra Brown Emily Sokoloski	Jean Larson Diane Tomasko	Jean Larson Diane Tomasko	Anita Papp Cindy Roberts
Ushers	Mike Caragol Tom Larson	Joe Bales John Bryk	Rich & Carol Lansing	Ray & Eileen Anderson	Mike Caragol Tom Larson	Joe Bales John Bryk
Flowers Given By	Diane Tomasko	Ann Martin	Nancy Headford	Cindy Roberts		Dolores Kuczo
Coffee Hour	Carol Lansing					
Tellers	Liz Bales Frank Dukenski	Steve Kuczo Bill Winter	Ray Anderson Dale Danowski	Tracey Wilkins Emily Sokoloski	Rich Kenyon	Nancy Headford Rich Kenyon



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.

Bruce Tomasko	1
Ella Kenyon	2
Sue Chrien	3
Elijah Caragol	4
Barbara Howard	7
Ashley Baronavski	8
Dale Danowski	8
Landon Jawarski	13
Susan Murphy	15
Natalie Kenyon	16
Nancy Headford	19
Joseph Roberts	21
Katherine Pytleski	22
James McWain	23
Priscilla Schulz	29
Raymond Anderson	31



2019
Blood Pressure
Screening Dates

Dec 15



Homebound Caroling Trip

Caroling to Shut-ins - On Sunday December 15 we will be visiting shut-ins and singing Christmas carols. Please bring a lunch to eat at Salem after coffee hour. We plan to leave for caroling at 11:45 am. All are welcome. If you have questions, contact Jean Larson or Sandra Brown.

Salem Book Club meets on the first Tuesday at noon in the Salem Lounge. The December discussion will be on **December 3rd – Sandalwood Tree** by Elle Newmark. The book club will not meet in January. 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	



We Are Grateful

Capital Improvements

Joan Crossman (in memory of Garrie Schulz),
Leonard Outhouse (in memory of Garrie Schulz)



Food Pantry

Dave Albers, Joe & Liz Bales, Dick & Roberta Bellows, Burroughs Fund,
Barbara Davis, Barbara Howard
(in memory of Garrie Schulz) - Marvin & Gail Hill, Rich & Carol Lansing
(in memory of Doris Koehler) - Rich & Carol Lansing

Memorial Donations (in memory of Garrie Schulz)

Marjo Anderson, Ray & Eileen Anderson, Bert & Cary Andren,
Norean Bradley, Pauline Boyum, Sandra Brown, Marjorie Goodfellow,
Tom & Kim King, Ann Martin, Barbara Tracey, Chris Wolff

Dear Pastor Anderson and Salem Lutheran Church,

Please accept my sincere appreciation, on behalf of Habitat for Humanity of Coastal Fairfield County (Habitat CFC), for your support. With this letter, Habitat CFC gratefully acknowledges your contribution of \$400.00 in support of the Community Bridgebuilders Coalition.

As you may know, Habitat CFC provides new homes and bright futures for hard working local families. Future homeowners work alongside Habitat staff and volunteers, devoting 500 hours of sweat equity to help build their houses. They also participate in educational programs intended to give them the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful homeowners. Each family ultimately purchases their home from Habitat CFC well below cost, with no down payment and a zero interest mortgage. Your contribution enables us to build quality homes and ensure that housing costs for our deserving families are kept below 30% of their income. Since 1985, Habitat CFC has built 220 plus homes in Fairfield County and we are extremely proud of a success rate that exceeds 95%.

The impact of every Habitat for Humanity home would not be possible without committed donors and volunteers. Your contribution is both meaningful and truly appreciated. Should you desire additional information about the difference you've made or wish to help us build or otherwise fulfill our mission, please let us know.

Thank you again for your support and partnership.

With gratitude,
Kristen Alvanson
Director of Development

Flying with Allergies and Asthma

Air travel is fast and convenient when traveling great distances, but the prospect of an in-flight medical emergency is a serious concern for people with asthma and allergies. Nearly 2 percent of in-flight medical emergencies are allergy-related.

Always pack your asthma and allergy medications (quick-relief inhaler, epinephrine auto-injectors, nasal sprays, antihistamines) in a carry-on. Do not keep medications in checked luggage.

If allergic to animals:

- Request to sit as far away as possible from pets when making a reservation. Some airlines require 24-hour notice.
- Consider wearing a mask or nasal filters to block pet allergens.
- Pre medicate with an antihistamine or a nasal spray.
- Find out if the airline's medical emergency kit includes an Epi-pen and a quick-relief albuterol inhaler.

If allergic to nuts or peanuts:

- Ask to preboard to clean the tray table and seat with a sanitary wipe.
- Request a nut-free or peanut-free buffer zone.
- Ask the flight crew to request other passengers not to eat nut or peanut products.
- Avoid the use of airline pillows or blankets which may contain nut or peanut residue.

If you have COPD, talk with your doctor to determine if air travel is safe for you. Your doctor can inform you if you need in-flight oxygen. It is important to tell the airline if you need oxygen when booking. You may also need a doctor's note.

If you have allergies and asthma, the best airline to travel in the U.S. is Jet Blue and the worst airline is Frontier.

Article taken from the Fall/Winter 2019 Volume of "Allergy & Asthma Today"



20 Travel Tips for Folks Over 50

- 1) Don't trust over-the-counter drugs overseas. Carry OTC drugs when you travel.
- 2) If going to a sunny place, ask your doctor if any of your prescription medications cause increased sensitivity to the sun.
- 3) Create a simple "Medical Information Form" to carry in your wallet.
- 4) Ask friends who recently visited your destination what they wished they had taken with them.
- 5) Remember that Medicare will not cover you outside of the US.
- 6) Even in the US, Medicare only pays to get you to the nearest hospital. If you need to be evacuated, it is at your expense.
- 7) Take more prescription medicine than you think you will need. (Like an extra weeks' worth).
- 8) Ask your doctor for duplicate prescriptions in case your pills are lost or stolen.
- 9) Put your pills in your carry-on, not your checked luggage.
- 10) Adjust your schedule of prescription medicine to account for time-zones.
- 11) If you are susceptible to motion sickness, the best location in a boat is amidship, and the best location in an airplane is over the wing.
- 12) The 7 triggers of traveler's diarrhea are custards, raw vegetables, raw eggs or unpasteurized cheeses, tap water and ice cubes, leafy green vegetables, raw shellfish, and raw meat.
- 13) Imodium AD is the world's best medicine for traveler's diarrhea.
- 14) Shake the bottle of sunscreen well before applying.
- 15) The world's strongest sunscreens are made with either Americaine or Dermoplast.
- 16) If you get a bug bite or bee sting, apply meat tenderizer (like Accent) to reduce pain and swelling at the site.
- 17) To avoid sunstroke, eat bananas, tomatoes, and oranges which are rich in electrolytes. Also be sure to drink plenty of water.
- 18) Never wear new shoes especially hiking boots on vacation. Take a few weeks to break shoes in first.
- 19) If you take Nitro for your heart, make sure the pills or patches are fresh.
- 20) If you take insulin, carry a prescription for your syringes.

Source: "A Senior's Guide to Healthy Travel" by Donald L. Sullivan, Career Press.

Here is the update about Clean Slate legislation that Tom Flynn shared with the Council of Churches

Status of Clean Slate Legislation

Delegates Meeting, November 19, 2019

What Happened Last Session

Concentration originally on software solution. However, estimated cost of software unacceptable.

Revised bill concentrated on less onerous manual, one-at-a-time solution, involving Pardons from the Board of Pardons and Parole. However, this version never got a vote, to some extent due to resistance from bureaucracy

What is Happening Now, In between Sessions

Last session, via changes in another bill at the last minute, a Council on Collateral Consequences of a Criminal Record was created (study committee) charged with identifying ALL statutes possibly impeding those who have left prison from the first hour forward, and recommending legislation to modify/remove all such laws deemed inappropriate. Council has to report by February 1

Preliminary report from their Employment subcommittee recognizes need for some kind of legislation like Clean Slate as one of many other possible Bills. It now appears likely to be getting special status as we believe the Governor seems to have taken special interest in it.

It is clear to CONECT that a software solution will solve only part of the problem. Some improved manual one-by-one process will be needed, continuing to involve Board of Pardons and Parole. CONECT now providing Pardon petitioners consulting on easing manual process by using former inmates who have had experiences working through the process as instructors.

CONECT is offering to do presentation to faith communities on this subject (CONECT On The Road) featuring former inmates telling their story regarding navigating the present process.

What Happens Next Session (Starts February 1)

Some sort of Clean Slate legislation will likely be introduced in the coming session. CONECT plans on supporting this effort, but trying to make sure it is as robust as possible—that no key features are sacrificed simply to make the Bill easier to pass.

**CT Juvenile Justice Alliance Update
CCGB Delegates Meeting – Nov. 19, 2019**

Where are youth under 18 incarcerated in Connecticut in 2019?

- **Pre-trial** - charged but not sentenced in the *juvenile system*
 - Bridgeport detention center - run by CSSD/Judicial Branch (88 double-occupancy beds)
 - Hartford detention center - run by CSSD/Judicial (88 beds)
- **Post-"trial"** - case has been heard and you've gotten your sentence in *juvenile system*
 - REGIONS secure - separate unit within Bridgeport detention center - run by CSSD/Judicial Branch (12 of the 88 beds are REGIONS)
 - REGIONS secure - separate unit within Hartford detention center - run by CSSD/Judicial Branch (12 of 88 beds are REGIONS)
 - Journey House - secure section of Natchaug Hospital - run by CSSD/Judicial Branch - ONLY FOR GIRLS UNDER 18 (13 beds)
 - *There are 16 additional secure beds for boys due to open in 2020*
- **Pre-trial** - charged but not sentenced in the *adult system*
 - Manson Youth Institution (MYI) - run by Department of Corrections (boys) (713 bed capacity for boys 14--21/pop=47 boys under age 18);
 - York Institution - run by Department of Corrections (all women in the state) (900? Bed capacity; only 3 girls under age 18)
 - *There are 16 additional staff secure beds due to open in 2020*
- **Post-trial** - case heard, found guilty, in the *adult system*
 - Manson Youth Institution (MYI) - run by Department of Corrections
 - York Institution - run by Department of Corrections (girls)

*Note - there are also two REGIONS programs that are "staff secure" - if you really want to run away, you're probably going to be able to get away. Those are in Waterbury and Milford. I don't know why the names are the same, yes, it's super confusing.

Through the first series of vision sessions, conducted with their peers during 2017 and 2018, the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance Justice Advisors identified seven key themes that are commonly experienced by youth impacted by the juvenile justice system. (Our Justice Advisors are 18 to 25 year olds from the communities most impacted by the justice system.)

The Seven Themes of System Involvement

(the root causes of justice system-involvement)

1. Economic insecurity
2. Housing insecurity
3. Trauma within communities
4. Lack of trust in systems that display abuses of authority
5. A need for more positive influences & credible messengers
6. Lack of hope
7. A need for equal opportunities

Structural inequities, gone unaddressed for decades, mean communities of color and communities impacted by poverty do not get the same opportunities to thrive as more affluent, predominantly white communities. More so, these themes highlight the multiple systems that have failed to provide a safe, stable environment that allows youth to avoid situations where they have to make, or feel they have to make, hard or no-win choices that lead to justice system involvement.

Based on the experiences of youth and community members, we believe finding, funding, and implementing solutions to these commonly experienced inequities and injustices would dramatically reduce the number of system-involved youth, decrease an individual's chances of potential justice system involvement and save the state thousands in associated costs.

#InvestinMeCT

The Invest in Me, Connecticut (#InvestinMeCT) campaign was launched to demand equitable investment in solutions to address The Seven Themes of System Involvement. The Justice Advisors were clear this means investment not only of dollars, but also time and love. By asking decision makers to shift dollars and priorities from youth arrest, probation, and incarceration into things like housing, jobs, education, and recreation, CTJJA aims to build opportunity-rich communities where all youth and families can access the resources they need to succeed.

Two-pronged approach

1. *Avoiding the entry points of the justice system by addressing The Seven Themes of System Involvement.*
2. *Reducing recurrent justice system involvement and improving youth outcomes by creating alternatives to incarceration.*



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION

A Veteran's Struggle to Connect

Aaron Fuller

I'm a Navy chaplain, a former submarine warfare officer and a military veteran of 18 years, but I have trouble finding the words to talk about my ministry to veterans and to give voice to the experience of military service. Despite my experience of multiple deployments and the fast pace of daily military life, I've never been on the front lines of combat, and I'm not dealing with the well-known effects of trauma that so many veterans struggle with today.

I've just returned from my most recent deployment and, while the "operational tempo" was high, this wasn't my most difficult one, and Europe is hardly a dangerous environment. I did my job, and now that I'm finished and back in the United States, life can return to normal.

But life has felt anything but normal. The pace has been nonstop: deciding where to live, getting belongings moved, starting new employment, reestablishing connections with my synod, and responding to requests from family, friends and colleagues I haven't seen in a year. There hasn't been a lot of time to decompress and process my deployment—the physical, emotional and spiritual fatigue; the questions; the disappointment and sadness; the joy and success.

There also aren't a lot of people to talk with about my experience. People try their best to listen and, while I appreciate their effort, I can see in their eyes they're uncomfortable. They don't know how to respond to my cynicism, my burnout and my sobering declaration that my deployment was "just another job," thereby deflating their romantic view of my "sacrifice."

I sense my words and mere presence make them feel awkward. Not wanting to be a burden nor take out my frustration on them, I stay silent. But the silence is isolating and is almost too much to bear sometimes. In those moments, even God feels far from me.

As a Navy chaplain and a Lutheran, I know that faith hinges on this: God is near in these moments, especially in these moments. God is near even when I don't feel or believe it. I know it takes time for the Spirit to work in me and, through others, to heal me, to make sense of the many things that don't make sense right now and to make me whole.

Right now, dealing with myself and others takes a tremendous amount of grace. At times the challenge is overwhelming, but I take it day by day.



My hope in sharing this is twofold. First, I want all my brothers and sisters who call themselves "veteran"—whether they've served in combat or in peacetime operations—to know they're not alone. Feelings of awkwardness and isolation and questions of belief happen—even to the chaplain. My hope is that, as you realize your own struggles, you remain steadfast in the most important battle we fight—the battle of faith. In moments of question, isolation and unbelief, I pray you will hold fast to the truth that God is near and redemption is possible.

My second hope is for people reading this who don't claim the title "veteran." I ask that you put aside your assumptions of veterans and military service, whether overly critical or overly romantic. We aren't willing killers carrying out oppressive agendas, nor do we all view ourselves as heroic defenders of freedom. We are simply human.

Seek out a veteran as one in need of God's presence, grace and redemption. Connecting won't be easy, as only about 7% of our nation's population are veterans and fewer than 1% are actively serving. Trying to connect might just take an act of faith, an act that you and our veterans won't regret.

Fuller is a bi-vocational pastor serving as a Navy Reserve chaplain stationed in southwestern Germany



Companions in Christ

The global church is a reality, not just an abstract concept, for the thousands of Lutherans engaged in ELCA companion-synod relationships.

"Companion synods nurture a church that is global, not only the parochial enclave of being together," said Rafael Malpica Padilla, executive director of ELCA Global Mission.

Sixty-four ELCA synods have at least one global-church companion. Because many synods relate to multiple companion churches, more than 120 companion-synod relationships exist. Most participating churches, including the ELCA, are members of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Mission Support funding enhances the ministry of the LWF and the companion-synod program.

For Martin Malley of Ralston, Nebraska, participating in the Nebraska Synod's relationship with the Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania "enlarges my worldview and lets me see outside my box."



Visiting Tanzania during a synod trip was Malley's first peek beyond his "box." By the end of the weekend, I was so taken with the people and the beauty of the place that I was on fire!" he said.

Now Malley serves as the synod's volunteer coordinator of Tanzania ministries, weaving myriad Nebraska-Tanzania connections into the fabric of the synod and diocese. Scores, if not hundreds, of Lutherans have traveled between Nebraska and Tanzania and built long-standing personal relationships over time, said Brian Maas, bishop of the Nebraska Synod.

Nebraskans and Tanzanians swap pulpits, visit each other's schools and congregations, and keep in touch via Facebook. Nebraskans have donated generously to the Northern Diocese, funding scholarships, purchasing textbooks, equipping evangelists with motorcycles and more. But "this is not about us doing projects," Malley said. "It's about us having Christian friends on the other side of the world!"

In companion-synod relationships, care and support flow both ways. Visitors from the Nkuu Kati Lutheran parish took note when Malley and other members of Messiah Lutheran in Ralston showed how they were retrofitting the church's bathrooms to accommodate people of all abilities. "Three months later [Nkuu Kati] sent a check for \$300 to support our project," Malley said. "We knew then that this was a partnership."