



June 2020

the
SPIRIT

Salem Lutheran Church

shalom - salaam - salem - peace

A Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Congregation

A "Love Letter" from Dale Danowski to her Salem Family...

Dear Salem Family,

This pandemic knows no bounds. Many patients continue to deal daily with COVID-19's effects on physical well-being. Every day we see its harmful impact on the economy, including the financial health of many colleagues. Concerns about sickness, family members, job loss or other pressures create a huge emotional toll, as well.

As a nurse leader, I have witnessed some of the most devastating illness, despair and loss in my 39-year career. At St. Vincent's Medical Center in Bridgeport, we admitted our first COVID-19 case in mid-March and saw a steady increase daily until we reached a peak of 140 hospitalized patients in mid-April. While we have celebrated several amazing recovery stories after many weeks of grave illness, we sadly also mourn over 120 deaths in just two months. Consistent with the trends in Fairfield County, our decline has been slower than other regions and we just recently dipped under a census of 70 patients in-house with over 20 patients remaining in our intensive care units. While the state reports declining numbers, we continue to see 5-7 new patients presenting to the Emergency Department with symptoms every day. This pandemic has impacted all segments of our society, but the elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions are at much higher risk for mortality.

My greatest concern is that the "re-opening" of the state will spark another surge in COVID cases. For my Salem family, I can only imagine how difficult it has been for members of our congregation to be so isolated after decades of worshipping together. I am grateful for all of the efforts to conduct virtual opportunities to connect for worship or meetings and I suggest we all remain highly cautious as we approach the recovery phase. The main driver of this illness is close person to person contact. The current guidelines suggest avoiding gatherings of more than five people, consistent wearing of a mask and maintaining a 6-foot social distance at all times. Please adopt these safe practices as a habit.

At St. Vincent's, we are working hard to keep everyone safe and healthy. Employees are screened for symptoms and undergo temperature checks each time they enter our facilities, and are tested as appropriate. Masks

at work are mandatory for everyone. Unfortunately, we continue to see a fair number of patients who test positive, despite being symptom-free. We are concerned that many people have put off medical care during this time. We have many physicians providing telehealth appointments, so please do not ignore your medical needs. Never delay emergency care — your life could depend on it! During the pandemic, there has been a sharp decline nationwide in people seeking care for heart conditions & stroke in particular. These and other conditions do not get better on their own. Seek emergency care when you need it. We are ready to help you safely & promptly.

There remain many unknowns about this disease. The illness course can be complex with rapidly declining status in otherwise healthy individuals. The testing is limited and sometimes unreliable. The treatments are still rather "experimental" and a vaccine is not ready for primetime. But we do know it is spread by close human contact. Many of the transmissions have been within families and groups at social gatherings. We must limit our risks by adhering to the guidelines. While this vexing situation is overwhelming at times, it has also brought people together in new and interesting ways. We have celebrated many moments considered to be "silver linings" and I would encourage everyone to reflect on their own experiences of gratitude in the midst of the darkness. On Easter Sunday, our lead physician on our Hospitalist Team accompanied our hospital chaplain on "mobile mass rounds", traveling unit to unit, praying and singing praises for staff members caring for our patients....it was a joyous site to behold.

I am so grateful for all of the community support of healthcare providers and first responders...it has truly carried us through challenging days. I have leaned on my faith many days when the way forward seemed impossible. We finally see the glimpses of light ahead and I'm praying we don't take a step backward. Please stay safe, healthy and keep praying!

Sincerely,
Dale Danowski RN
Regional Vice of President Patient Care Services
Fairfield Region at Hartford Healthcare

GUIDE TO VIRTUAL / ONLINE CHURCH

TO ACCESS WORSHIP VIA FACEBOOK:

You do NOT have to be a Facebook member to watch it.

Just go to www.facebook.com/salembridgeport.

On the left, click on videos, which will bring up "Latest Videos".

Then just click on the one you want to watch.

(Sometimes a notice might pop up to say you can't access it,

but if that happens, just click on the message and it should disappear and the video should play.)

If you can't hear, please know that the videos are closed captioned, so you can see the text (at least of the speaking parts

if not the singing) as you watch. In order to see the text, however, you need to turn that feature on for your device.

(On my iPhone 6s, I went to Settings, then Accessibility, then scrolled down to Subtitles & Captioning, then turned on Closed Captions & SDH, and voila! The captions appeared like magic!)

TO ACCESS WORSHIP VIA YOUTUBE:

We are also posting our worship on YouTube.

To access worship that way,

go to YouTube.com,

click on the magnifying glass to search for Salem Lutheran Church Bridgeport CT and we should come up.

There'll be a red circle with a white S in it and under that are the videos.

Once you find Salem on YouTube, subscribe to our channel and it will be easier to find next time.

Again, if you can't hear, videos are closed captioned. Just click on the 3 dots on the upper right corner of the screen to turn on closed captioning.

TO ACCESS COFFEE HOUR, MEETINGS, & OTHER GATHERINGS:

Meetings and Gatherings (like Coffee Hour, Bible Study, Council and Committees) are being held online via Zoom.

If your Salem committee or group would like to meet via Zoom, please contact Karl

by emailing him at salemsec123@sbcglobal.net or by leaving a message on the church phone, 203-336-3300.

To access the invitation go to our website, click on the Resources tab, and click on Calendar.

So if you'd like to join coffee hour, for example, click on "coffee hour" for the date you want, and it will open up the invitation. At the bottom of the invitation is even an option to "copy to my calendars".

Again, if you have any difficulty accessing any meeting or event, call or text me at 203-982-3441

Links to zoom meetings will be emailed out via our weekly email blast (which also posts to Facebook and our website).

TO ACCESS STAFF:

Due to the pandemic, our Office Manager, Karl, and I will be working primarily from our homes.

I have been coming in once a week to record worship

and Karl usually comes in on Thursdays to take care of tasks that cannot be accomplished from elsewhere.

To reach Karl, just call the church number and leave a message.

He will pick up your message remotely and return your call.

And if you need pastoral care – even just to talk – please don't hesitate to call or text me at 203-982-3441.

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 Thursday 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

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
Frank Dukenski, President
Ray Anderson, Vice-President
Nancy Headford, Secretary
Rich Kenyon, Treasurer
Katie Adams
Liz Bales
Sandra Brown
Steve Kuczo
Evan Lansing
Emily Sokoloski
Diane Tomasko
Bill Winter

We Are Grateful



Memorial Donations

Kathryn Alvarado, Barbara Anderson, Mike & Sally Przybyla, Ron & Charlotte Schlegel, Vivian Stogis (all in memory of Reinie Lange)

Pauline Boyum (in memory of Reinie Lange, Derm & Virginia Luckner, and Ron Clough)

Outreach

Marjo Anderson, Rich & Mary Ann Kenyon

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

Next deadline date is **June 15th for the **July/August** issue!**

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

June 2020

Salem Lutheran Church



SUN	MON 1	TUE 2	WED 3	THU 4	FRI 5	SAT 6
7 The Holy Trinity ● 9:30am Worship ● 10:30am Salem Coffee Hour	8 ● 6:30pm Social Ministry Committee	9 ● 6pm Stewardship Committee	10	11	12	13
14 Second Sunday after Pentecost ● 9:30am Worship ● 10:30am Salem Coffee Hour	15 ● 6:30pm Finance Committee ● 7:30pm Executive Committee	16	17	18	19	20
21 Third Sunday after Pentecost ● 9:30am Worship ● 10:30am Salem Coffee Hour	22 ● 7pm Salem Council Meeting	23	24	25	26	27
28 Fourth Sunday after Pentecost ● 9:30am Worship ● 10:30am Semi Annual Meeting	29	30				

Note—As of now, the 9:30 worship will be online only. You can join in the worship service on Facebook. Go to <https://www.facebook.com/SalemBridgeport/> Sunday at 9:30am.

Sandra Brown.....	10
Suzanne Dow	12
Matt Tomasko.....	21
Paul Baronavski, Sr.....	22
Annika Larson	23
Elise DeWalt.....	24



The Salvation Army has a variety of programs to help people. If you are 60 years and over and live in Connecticut, the CSFP 'Silver' program is for you. It is a monthly food basket containing a variety of foods. If you live in the 06604 zip code area, the Salvation Army has a food pantry. Operation Fuel



Energy Assistance Program is designed to help low income families with electricity/gas/oil. For information about these programs and an appointment call (203) 334-0995 ext 105. Grandfamilies Together is a support group for grandparents and other kinship caregivers. For information about this program call (203) 334-

0995 ext 107. There are also several volunteer opportunities available. For information about these, contact Major Lydia Pearson at (203) 334-0995.

2020
Blood Pressure
Screening Dates

Jul tba	Oct 4
Aug tba	Nov 8
Sep 13	Dec 6

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

Joan B
Barbara B
Sam B
Erick D
Grace D
Hannah & Joseph
Bob H
Dennis H
Sylvitha
Jay
Mike R
Jane M
Jana B
William S
Daphne B
Peter K
Bobby W

Anna
Barbara
James S
Sarah R
Brooks A
Angie
Liz F.
Hazel P
Katherine P



Salem Lutheran Church

Semiannual Meeting

These are trying times. The pandemic has forced us to suspend our regular services. Meetings of Council and committees have been moved to ZOOM. (There's a name for you.) Bible study on Wednesday has also moved to ZOOM. I guess we are zooming along!

We need to have a semiannual meeting. We are too many members to ZOOM the meeting. We are definitely too many to legally gather in church for such a meeting. But, and I repeat myself, we need to have a semiannual meeting.

The New England Synod legal team has determined a set of guidelines which must be followed. While it is possible that we may be able to meet in the church, we must be prepared for alternate plans. These alternate plans must conform to the aforementioned guidelines.

The Salem Council has set Sunday, June 28, 2020, as the date for the meeting. We will hold the meeting immediately after the service. If we are allowed to meet in the church that will be great. If not, we will have a drive-in version of the 9:30 AM church service and the semiannual meeting immediately following the service.

One reason for the urgency of the semiannual meeting is the fact that the Synod legal team found two clauses of our newly adopted Constitution as unacceptable. The COUNCIL has reviewed the legal team opinion and proposed some "fixes." If we adopt these fixes at our meeting, we can re-submit our "Adopted Constitution" and feel confident that it will be accepted.

Accordingly, Council President Frank Dukenski has summarized the "fixes" on the next page:

Adopted Constitution

Re: Congregation Meeting

C10.04. Voting members present at a congregational meeting shall constitute a quorum.

Synod committee felt a number should be included here.

Re: Council

C12.02. The voting membership of the Congregation Council shall consist of the pastor(s), the officers of the congregation, and at least one youth. Any voting member of the congregation may be elected, subject only to the limitation on the length of continuous service permitted in that office. A member's place on the Congregation Council shall be declared vacant if the member a) ceases to be a voting member of this congregation or b) is absent from four successive regular meetings of the Congregation Council without cause. Consistent with the laws of the state in which this congregation is incorporated, the congregation may adopt procedures for the removal of a member of the Congregation Council in other circumstances.

Synod committee felt a number should be included here. Present language implied just officers on a very small COUNCIL.

New Proposed Adopted Constitution

Re: Congregation Meeting

C10.04. ***Twenty-four or more*** voting members present at a congregational meeting shall constitute a quorum.

Council voted to set that number at twenty-four based on the number members of present COUNCIL.

Re: Council

C12.02. The voting membership of the Congregation Council shall consist of ***at least 9 members including*** the pastor(s), the officers of the congregation, and at least one youth. Any voting member of the congregation may be elected, subject only to the limitation on the length of continuous service permitted in that office. A member's place on the Congregation Council shall be declared vacant if the member a) ceases to be a voting member of this congregation or b) is absent from four successive regular meetings of the Congregation Council without cause. Consistent with the laws of the state in which this congregation is incorporated, the congregation may adopt procedures for the removal of a member of the Congregation Council in other circumstances.

Salem Council voted to set that number at "at least nine members." The number was also based on the fact that congregation is both aging and becoming smaller leading to difficulty in getting COUNCIL members.

To the People of the New England Synod,

Way back in January we had church life. That model of church life consisted of a building with a paid staff, in-person gatherings, people shaking hands, sharing food, singing, hugging, and programs for various age groups. Some of us have only known that model of church life, and we've been lamenting as we've witnessed the struggle to maintain it. I now call that model of church life the January Church, because it was last in January when we experienced it fully.

Much has changed since then, and every day brings more transition.

The purpose of this letter is to set the stage for what's next in two areas, Reopening and Worship.

This letter is longer than usual. Be forewarned.

Reopening

It is clear that re-opening is going to be a slow and gradual process involving some careful planning. This will require congregations to be flexible and adaptive because change will be the consistent theme going forward. In some ways, I believe reopening will be more challenging than the decision to close.

Considerations for planning your re-opening

1. Recognize that re-opening is not going back to normal. The church we all remember, what I call the January Church, is something we will not be returning to any time soon. If you view re-opening as an attempt to get back to the model of church as usual, I believe you will be continually frustrated. We must understand the need for grace and patience with one another as we all attempt to discover Christ in new ways.
2. Follow the guidance of your state's governor and health officials. New England Synod congregations are located in seven different states. While some states are acting in coordination with one another, this will not be the case throughout our region. In addition, I would not anticipate a great deal of specificity in the guidance for houses of worship. There are multiple reasons for that, including concerns about first amendment matters. While there may not be specific recommendations regarding houses of worship, look carefully at plans for schools (elementary through high school), since they are most similar to churches in their dynamics, for instance, people traveling from a regional proximity, sitting in rows, gathering for food, interacting socially, etc. My advice is to watch the guidance for schools and translate that application to church life.
3. Recognize that a phased re-opening is probably your best scenario. As an example, [Rhode Island](#) has a current limit of 5 persons gathering, and anticipates a process that will increase to 10, then to 15, then to 50. How will your congregation adapt to this type of model? I think a phased re-opening might look like this:

Phase 1 – When your state indicates a likely date for relaxing the quarantine, ask yourselves, “What’s most in need of attention?” One way to answer this question is to consider the most vulnerable and those who are grieving. Maybe it’s best to look at some social ministry that has been curtailed, such as a food pantry, before considering worship. In addition, if your congregation has had multiple deaths, perhaps attending to grief via memorial services is an appropriate first priority. The larger point is, don’t try to do everything all at once.

Phase 2 – As the next level of quarantine is relaxed in your state, begin conversations about how your congregation might be able to come together in smaller configurations. Not everyone will want to nor should they want to gather publicly, but some people are eager to have some in-person contact. One congregation might consider a gathering of its shepherding groups where six or so people meet. If you have the capability, perhaps that first meeting could be outside. In other words, think of Phase 2 as an intermediary step, think small. Also think of those not able or desirous of an in-person gathering, how will you continue to attend to them?

Phase 3 – If your state officials relax restrictions to larger group gatherings, ask yourself how this might be done. A favorite question of mine these days is: What’s doable? Following the Rhode Island guidance, this means groups of 50 could gather together. If you have a smaller congregation this might work. But if you are in a larger congregation, does that mean you need to have multiple worship services or staggered attendance plans? In this phase, you’ll also need to consider ways you will attend to expectations of sanitizing your building. Additionally, are you continuing an online presence as well? How will you do this simultaneously? One church is considering plans for an in-person gathering on Sundays, but then an online gathering on Wednesdays. Are you now asking your pastor, administrator, musicians and others to do twice as much work? Have you considered partnering with another church to share these responsibilities and more evenly distribute the workload?

Whether you use this concept or another, I urge you to recognize that this will be a gradual re-opening. You should also plan for the inevitable “two-steps forward, one-step back” scenario. Several health officials have indicated we may have times when the virus spreads quickly and we may need to restrict our activities again. How will you plan for this possible return to Phase 1?

The reality is: this is hard. We are trying to balance a concern for health and safety with a desire to connect again. Take it slow; go one step at a time and recognize not everyone is ready to make the same step at the same time, so allow for flexibility.

Resources

There have been many resources published elsewhere that may help in your planning for re-opening, and I’ve listed some below. This is not an exhaustive list, but some comprehensive ones.

[A Plan for Returning to Church by the Wisconsin Council of Churches](#) – This resource also makes use of a phased approach, as well as raising important considerations around actual worship practices. Again, remember to always be aware of your own state's health officials' recommendations.

[Coming Back Together by the Three ELCA Synods in Texas](#) – The three ELCA synods in Texas and Louisiana have produced this guide. Since that part of the country has chosen to re-open sooner than New England, we can look to their experience. I'll be in touch with my colleagues there to learn from them as they go through this process.

[Opening Up Again](#) – This is a document produced by the Federal Government that contains helpful information. It also uses the phased opening approach. This document contains important reminders about health and safety protocols.

Throughout this time of pandemic, I ask your patience with one another. Do not rush decisions. Be mindful of decisions that you make for all your constituents, as well as for longer term implications.

Worship for the Long Haul

I have been impressed with how rapidly you have adapted to the new reality of worship and congregational life in these times. The widespread use of online worship, Bible Studies, fellowship hours, and meetings using a variety of technologies is admirable. We are all still beginners in this work, learning as we go. Like toddlers learning to walk, we spend a fair amount of time falling down. But that's how we learn. That's ok.

As I've learned more and more about this disease and the likely trajectories of its impact on society, I'm realizing the need to begin making plans for the long haul. The commonly articulated time frame of 12-18 months before we achieve some semblance of broad public safety via a vaccine, credible treatments, and levels of herd immunity is a sobering timeline. Some have noted that timeline might be a best-case scenario. In light of this, I think we need to look at questions around the future both near term and long term of the church. For now, let's discuss our worship life together.

There is clearly a need for us to think and plan for ongoing changes in worship life, chiefly around questions of online worship and some practices which have always been in-person such as Baptism, Communion, Confirmation, Ordination, weddings and funerals. How do we navigate the terrain of a three-legged stool of theological understandings, pastoral needs and technological innovation? While some have chosen a quick fix approach, I've not wanted to go that route for multiple reasons, which I have [previously described](#). I'm grateful to the pastors, deacons and congregations of this synod for their patience in honoring my request that we refrain from an impulsive decision to engage in various practices around Holy Communion.

However, I do think the time has come for us to dive more deeply into this subject. I am choosing a harder path in the hopes that the outcome will yield a more thoughtful decision. That

path is to engage as widely as possible in a series of discussions on our practices of worship in these times.

We will begin with a series of discussions at the conference level with pastors and deacons. Then, we will introduce an opportunity for congregations to engage in similar discussions. There will be resources made available in both written, audio and video formats. These will be small digestible pieces that address the topic at hand. The full details of this approach are in development and will be available next week.

My goal in all this is two-fold: 1. to deepen our understanding of the sacraments, and 2. to help provide for informed decisions as we move into a new way of being church.

I could choose to simply write you all a letter, tell you what I think, and be done with it. That seems easier and briefer, but does not honor your gifts, intelligence and faithfulness. I'm choosing the harder way, but I believe the end result will be more broadly embraced. I will have more information and details next week, and you'll actually have tools to put in people's hands next Wednesday.

Finally, a brief word on the "big picture." I think we are in a time of transition. I don't fully understand it, but I sense that these are times of significant cultural and spiritual transformation. If you are interested in exploring this with me, I'm having a series of Wednesday evening Zoom discussions starting next week. More information on that is [here](#).

Once again, thank you for all you are doing. I'm witnessing so many examples of congregations, places of ministry, and individuals rising to the challenges. We are demonstrating to those around us that Christ is alive in the people of our synod. My confidence in the present and the future of this church continues to rise as each day I hear about Lutherans being the hands and feet of Jesus.

Sincerely in Christ,

Bishop Jim Hazelwood

DON'T LET YOUR GUARD DOWN

As we all continue to adapt to life during the COVID-19 pandemic and get into some routine, it's extremely important that we don't let our guard down. Even though your town and the state of Connecticut are lifting some restrictions, stay careful. The best way to do that is to stick to the simple things we know can stop the spread of the coronavirus. You've heard these tips before, but you'll keep hearing them because they're currently our best defense against the virus:



From
Our
Parish
Nurses

- Continue social distancing, at least 6 feet apart. In fact, stay home as much as you can.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- Don't touch surfaces out in public.
- Wear a mask or cloth face covering when you're out in areas where it's hard to social distance.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue and then throw it away. If you don't have a tissue handy, cough or sneeze into your long sleeve at the elbow fold.
- Try not to touch your mouth, nose or eyes.

Coronavirus and Stroke

There is a possible link between Coronavirus and a stroke. You should be aware of the signs and symptoms of a stroke. Think F.A.S.T.!

- **F**ace-Weakness on one side of the face.
- **A**rm-Weakness or numbness in one arm.
- **S**lurred speech or trouble getting words out.
- **T**ime-Note the time that signs and symptoms were first observed.

You may also notice sudden vision problems, a sudden severe headache, or sudden dizziness.

If you experience or someone else has these symptoms, call 9-1-1.

FIGHT STRESS with Healthy Habits

1. **Slow Down** – Plan ahead and allow enough time to get the most important things done without having to rush.
2. **Snooze More** – Try to get seven to nine hours of sleep each night. To fight insomnia, add mindfulness and activity.
3. **Let Worry Go** – The world won't end if a few things fall off of your plate. Give yourself a break and just breathe.
4. **Laugh It Up** – Laughter makes us feel good. Don't be afraid to laugh out loud, even when you are alone.
5. **Get Connected** – A daily dose of friendship is great medicine. Make time to call friends or family so you can catch up.
6. **Get Organized** – Use “to do” lists to help you focus on your most important tasks and take big projects one step at a time.
7. **Practice Giving Back** – Volunteer your time or spend time helping out a friend. Helping others helps you.
8. **Be Active Every Day** – Exercise can relieve mental and physical tension. Find something you think is fun and stick with it.
9. **Give Up Bad Habits** – Too much alcohol, tobacco, or caffeine can increase blood pressure. Cut back or quit to decrease anxiety.
10. **Lean Into Things You Can Change** – Make time to learn a new skill, work toward a goal, or to love and help others.
11. **Eat Smart** – Eat three healthy meals each day. Snack on fruits and vegetables. Cut back on junk foods.

From the American Heart Association

Notes from Boy Scout Troop 103

Scout Troop has had a good year so far with some big changes.

We did some camping this winter, which was a lot of fun, including a weekend of tubing at Mohawk Mountain! All campgrounds are now closed due to the pandemic.

We have scout Kemoy Blair who completed his Eagle requirements last year, passed his Board of Review and is waiting for his Eagle Court of honor.

A second scout, Alexander Valbuena, has completed his Eagle project and is waiting for his Eagle Board of Review.

Two Eagle Scout Court of Honor in one year is a great year!

Since the social distancing guidelines went into effect, the troop has been meeting every Monday night on Zoom. The scouts are working on Merit badges, advancement, and special projects thought up by Scoutmaster Luis Valbuena and the scouts themselves.

During this time, we have postponed an Eagle Court of Honor from March and the Pasta Dinner from April. Both will be rescheduled as soon as we get the all clear from our state leaders. We're not sure how we're going to pay for camp yet as our Pasta Dinner usually funds most of the cost.

Summer camp activities are also raising questions- we're sure it will be different but not sure just how. Our Scout Council leadership is asking parents questions and will be planning for the next several months.

Thanks for supporting our Troop!

Scoutmaster Luis Valbuena

Charter Organization Representative Bruce Tomasko

Troop Committee Chairman Wes Murphy





Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION

Zooming toward God's love

Reflections: Racial justice and COVID-19

By Lily R. Wu

In the heated battle of humanity versus COVID-19, the Zoom app is booming. People want to see and be seen. It's a big learning curve for many - but free and open to everyone!

Indeed, being seen, and even loved, is one of life's deepest joys. Conversely, not being seen, yet being hated, is a heavy stressor.

The surge of hate crimes against Asians in the United States shows that many people doubt Asian Americans as neighbors, friends and fellow citizens. No matter who we are, if we have a "Chinese" face, our personal safety and well-being are at risk - not only from coronavirus but from coronavirus rage.

The reported that two-thirds of those attacked are not even Chinese but of other Asian ethnicities. Spitting, verbal abuse, harassment, bullying, beatings. A 6-year-old boy was stabbed in the head and required stitches. Women are three times more likely to be harassed than men. One woman suffered severe chemical burns when a man deliberately threw acid at her.

I've been confronted and assaulted before. U.S. history and my own history tell me that living in my own city, my own country, is seriously dangerous. Now it is even worse.

My heart sank when elected leaders used such racist terms as "kung flu" and "Chinese virus."

Their ill-chosen words set up Asian Americans to be mocked and blamed. Angry people may choose at any time to lash out at us. Anyone targeted for violence knows what I mean. It feels as if just being out in public will mean having to run a gauntlet.

Meanwhile, the Asian American community is very diverse: culturally, geographically, socioeconomically. Some may say we have never experienced racism. But many will confirm the pain it causes when it does strike.

Please help to spread the word that people who "look Chinese" are not the virus. We are not COVID-19 carriers just because we are Asian. We are not the enemy. We are Asian Americans, trying to "flatten the curve" like mostly everybody else.

I know my resilience can happen only in a collective.

It's ghastly how many people have died so suddenly in Queens, N.Y. A dozen tractor-trailer-sized trucks - mobile morgues - were parked outside Elmhurst Hospital to store the bodies of the dead. I used to live in this immigrant enclave area of Queens, one of the most diverse counties in the United States. I loved the vibrant Chinese and Latino life there. Now it's shut down, and the people are reeling.

My church is located there. Eight blocks from the hospital, St. Jacobus Lutheran Church offers one of only two food pantries still open in Elmhurst, serving 100 to 300 families per week. There are more young families now, many of whom are Latino.

For many of these families, there are two or three generations living in an apartment, with no work to be had.

Available resources do not match the needs. "The virus has exposed what's been there all along," said Joe Mantovani, pastor of St. Jacobus. "How high the rents are. How hard it is to find enough work to feed their families."

Many Asian American families citywide are also at risk of starvation and homelessness, reported the Coalition for Asian American Children & Families. They are among the Americans of all backgrounds who work for low wages and tips with no safety net. The struggle is fierce for too many, including African Americans dying in high numbers.

We are trying, as New York Governor Andrew Cuomo urges, to be "tough, smart, disciplined, united and loving." I know my resilience can happen only in a collective. Every day I give God thanks for my husband, my family, my friends, my pastor and the caring people I don't know who work for peace and justice.

All of us in the United States have a long way to go - some much further than others. If we look to see the good in others, honor each other's humanity and work against poverty, despair and racism, we will make great strides for a better future for all.

I wish every Zoom user knew that a Chinese American, Eric Yuan, created the app. It's just one example of what Asian Americans can contribute to the United States and to the world. I pray that more of us will "Zoom together for racial justice," whether literally or not. "Join the Zoom meeting," I'd invite. "I'll bring Chinese food, you bring whatever you like and we'll share."

It could be a big learning curve at first. But with God as our host, we cannot fail. Free and open to everyone!



Lily R. Wu is a Chinese American Lutheran who has worked as a church communicator for more than 40 years. She also served as vice president of the ELCA Association of Asians and Pacific Islanders.



CHURCH ON A ROCK

"First [they] said we were crazy for building a Lutheran church," recalled Fabian Gaspar Cardenas, pastor of St. Augustine Lutheran Church in La Esmeralda, Guatemala. "Then they said we were crazy for building it on top of a hill."

But the St. Augustine community believed this audacious space -- high on a rock overlooking La Esmeralda — was exactly where God had called them to be. Cardenas said they were inspired by other churches and holy places they'd seen that were built on hilltops.

"It is better to build on a rock than in the sand, so that is why we built here," he added, referencing the Gospel of Matthew.

Though St. Augustine's building is new, the congregation has worshipped in La Esmeralda for more than 20 years since their return from Mexico, where they spent the worst years of Guatemala's civil war in refugee camps. Today the congregation strives to support sustainable livelihoods, health care and education for its community, said Stephen Deal, ELCA regional representative for Central America.

The ELCA has invested in the ministry of St Augustine by accompanying leaders within the Augustinian Lutheran Church of Guatemala (ILAG in Spanish). Cardenas and other ILAG pastors receive theological and evangelism training at retreats funded by Mission Support. For him, the opportunity to connect and grow together has been a great gift.

"[Hope] has been the thing that has supported us the most," Cardenas said. "And that is what have been able to share with my fellow pastors, especially in the retreats!" In his own ministry journey, a serious health condition nearly left Cardenas blind and delayed his pastoral training by over eight years.

Despite challenges to his health and the community, Cardenas has kept his vision fixed on God. For all who visit or pass by St. Augustine, he hopes that "when you look at the church, you remember that God is with you always, and you can do anything with God at your side."