



October 2020

the
SPIRIT

Salem Lutheran Church

shalom - salaam - salem - peace

A Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Congregation

In All Things Give Thanks

*"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstance, for this is the will of God ... for you...."
[1 Thessalonians 5:16-18]*

I don't know about you, but I sometimes find it difficult to be thankful. The pandemic has been going on now for 7 months, there has been an upending of our society since the death of George Floyd, there is pure chaos around this election season in our country, there is massive unemployment, every day seems to bring some new uncertainty, and then there are all the personal challenges that confront us. People are tired and drained and have little patience or resilience left. And yet scripture tells us that we are to "rejoice always" and "give thanks in all circumstances"! How does one do that???

One answer is to realize that there are always 2 ways of looking at something: as a glass half-empty or a glass half-full. And all it takes to move from seeing what is not there is to look for what is.

Let me give you an example.

While we have all been frustrated by the pandemic which has closed our building for over 7 months, we also need to be giving God thanks and praise for this situation that has forced us outside of our walls through cyberspace, across the country and perhaps across the world!

If you've been at our outdoor worship services this summer and you looked around, how many people did you see? On an average Sunday it would have been about 30 people. And you may have looked at those 30 people and remembered when we had 100 in worship and seen the empty space left by the 70 who weren't there and that made you sad. But here's a question for you: how many people were there worshipping in cyber-space? Before you read on, go ahead and guess.

At the 9/27 outdoor worship service, the video has already reached 1,352 people and **213 have watched the entire service!** The one from the week before has reached 1.1k people and 142 have watched the whole service! The one from 8/22 has had 136 thru plays and the one from 6/3, 231. **The one from Pentecost – with Genesis and New Direction Ministries – has reached 1.6k people!** And that's with just a couple of you sharing our posts! If every one of you on FB shared our worship service on your page, just imagine how many people we would reach!

Worship is not something we do to satisfy our own needs. Worship is not about what I want or about what you want. It's about what God wants. WE are not the focus of worship. The focus of worship is 2-fold:

- 1) to give praise and thanks to God and offer God the honor and glory due God's name; and
- 2) to tell of God's mighty acts and witness to God's unlimited power & unbounded love both to each other & to the world.

Here is the crazy truth: We actually have more people participating in worship NOW than we did when I came to Salem ten years ago! It's just that they aren't physically sitting next to us in the pews and we can't see them so we don't know who they are. But God knows! And every single one of those 136 or 142 or 213 or 231 people is hearing God's Word read and preached, hearing the music and the prayers and our affirmation that God loves all of God's children, and being invited deeper into relationship with God. We are doing what the Great Commission commanded us in a way we have never done before: we are truly going out into all the world.

Next time we gather for worship, look around at the people you can see beside you or on your computer screen and then look at the spaces in between and imagine all of those others who we can't see but who are there nonetheless. And give thanks not only for the people we can see but for all those others who maybe need what Salem is offering even more than we need it ourselves!

"To God be the glory! Great things he HAS done!" Great things God IS doing! And Great things God WILL be doing!
Amen??? Amen!!!

Abundant Blessings Be Yours!

Pastor Marjo

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

Thursday 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Worship Services

9:30am Outdoor Worship

Salem's Staff

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

Karl Kraft, Office Manager
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Pablo, Cruz, Sexton
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LEADERSHIP AT SALEM

COUNCIL

Marjo Anderson, Pastor
Ray Anderson, President
Tom Larson, Vice-President
Nancy Headford, Secretary
Rich Kenyon, Treasurer
Liz Bales
Sandra Brown
Judi Nielsen
Emily Sokoloski
Diane Tomasko
Bill Winter

We Are Grateful



Memorial Donations

Marvin & Gail Hill (In Memory of Derm and Virginia Luckner)

Outreach

Rich & Mary Ann Kenyon



"Are Forever Stamps OK?"

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

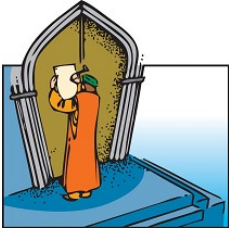

Next deadline date is **October 15th** for the
November issue!

Email submissions to
salemsec123@sbcglobal.net



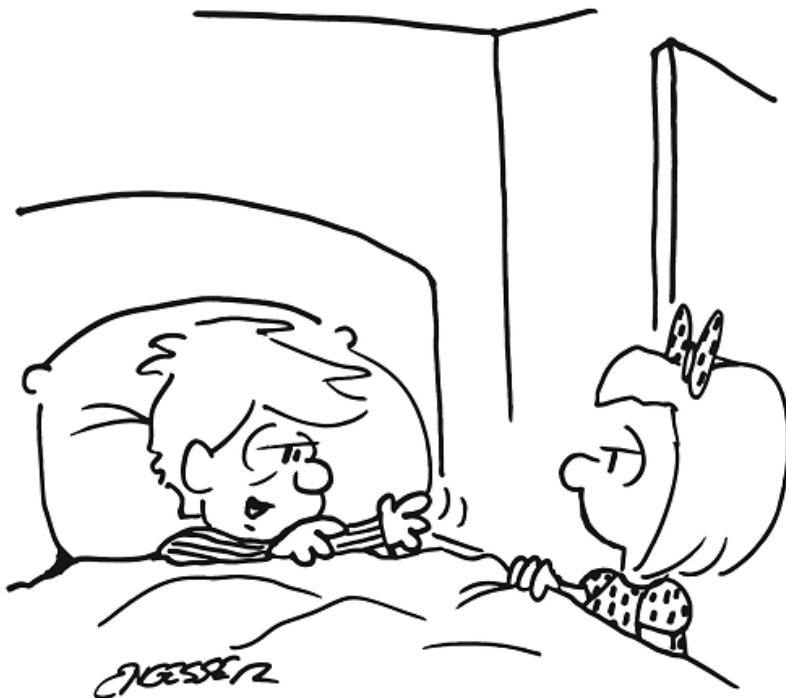
October 2020

Salem Lutheran Church

SUN		MON		TUE		WED		THU 1	FRI 2	SAT 3
								6pm Genesis Game Night for All	2pm God at the Center - a Conversation	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost 9:30am Worship 10:30am Salem Coffee Hour 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 12:30pm New Directions Ministries 4:15pm CPC Gazebo	4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on Anti		12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray	6pm Genesis Game Night for All	2pm God at the Center - a Conversation	8am Men's Breakfast				
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost 9:30am Worship 10:30am Salem Coffee Hour 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 12:30pm New Directions Ministries 4:15pm CPC Gazebo	Columbus Day - Office Closed 4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on Anti 6:30pm Social Ministry Committee	6pm Stewardship Committee	12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray	6pm Genesis Game Night for All	2pm God at the Center - a Conversation	11am Genesis Inner-View Chat and Chew				
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost 9:30am Worship 10:30am Salem Coffee Hour 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 12:30pm New Directions Ministries 4:15pm CPC Gazebo	4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on Anti 6:30pm Salem Finance Committee Meeting 7:30pm Salem Executive Committee Meeting		12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray	6pm Genesis Game Night for All	2pm God at the Center - a Conversation					
Reformation Sunday 9:30am Worship 10:30am Salem Coffee Hour 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 12:30pm New Directions Ministries 4:15pm CPC Gazebo	4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on Anti 7pm Council Meeting		12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray	6pm Genesis Game Night for All	2pm God at the Center - a Conversation	Reformation Day				

Marissa Luciani	1
Brandon DeWalt.....	2
Peggy Claus.....	4
Alicia Rosa	11
Joel Hintz	16
Leah Hintz.....	16
Philip Raschke	16
John Wilkins.....	16
William Sokoloski	17
Wes Murphy.....	18
Erin McPadden	19
Mary Ann Kenyon	20
Edith Larson.....	20
Scott DeWalt.....	21
Karen McPadden	21
Merlee Lange	21
Frank Claus.....	27

Megan Watts.....	28
Katherine Larson	31



**“Tell Mom I’ll stay home today
and do Sunday school online.”**

**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



Encourage One Another

The apostle Paul writes, "Encourage one another and build up each other." While we have been learning a lot of new ways to do that work, it's the work that our churches have been doing all along: encouraging one another within our congregation, building up the neighbors in our communities, strengthening our relationships with one another wherever we go.

Our congregation has continued in ministry through these times, staying connected, holding safe, sacred space through a time with a lot of unknowns and uncertainty. Here are some examples which you may not be aware of:

To answer the question of how you can be prepared for something that has never happened before, our Scouts suggested that "we need to keep informed, stay aware of what's happening around us, learn from others, help others and be flexible and open to new ideas."

The Council of Churches received a grant to provide meals to healthcare workers and families in need. Salem's kitchen has provided a great place to prepare these meals.

Bible Study was a time to share, read and discuss the Bible around a table with friends. With zoom, we are able to greet one another as we did in person, read and discuss God's word.

The United Congregational Church pantry is a drive through program that provides food every Monday evening to approximately 150 families. After Salem's food pantry closed several volunteers formed a partnership with the UCC pantry and now pick up food from the Connecticut Food Bank.

Your participation, passion, and financial support are part of helping us continue to be the church in these times. Look for a pledge card in the mail, prayerfully consider it, and return it to the church office by October 25th.

5 Quick Tips For Managing Your Weight

Doctors have said that many people will gain weight during the pandemic. Here some tips to help manage your weight.

- Keep portions smaller than your fist. It's easy to overeat when you have too much food on your plate. Smaller portions help prevent overeating. Overeating can make health problems worse, especially if you have diabetes. One way to control overeating is to reduce portion sizes when you eat. For most foods, a reasonable portion is $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 cup – about the size of a woman's fist. Even if your fist is larger than that, it is still a handy measuring tool that goes everywhere you go. Just keep your portions smaller than your fist. Not all foods fit the "fist" rule. The two most common exceptions are:
 - Lean meat, chicken and fish. For these foods, keep portions the size of a deck of cards (about half the size of your fist) and trim all visible fats before cooking.
 - Plain vegetables, including salads without dressing. You can have as much as you want because these foods are nutritious, filling and low in calories.
- Control your hunger with filling foods that are low in calories. Foods such as lower-sodium soup, salad, fruits and vegetables can help fill you up without adding a lot of calories. These foods will satisfy hunger and help you lose weight. Research shows that people feel less hungry when they eat a certain volume (amount) of food. High-fiber foods, such as fruits and vegetables, can provide a feeling of fullness and also digest slowly. That helps you feel satisfied longer so you eat less.
- Keep track of what you eat. When you keep track of what you eat, you're more likely to meet your food goals. Studies show that keeping a food log or diary helps people lose weight and keep it off.
- Make trade-offs to reduce how much sodium, saturate and trans fat and sugar you eat. Foods high in fat and sugar are often high in calories, too. But that doesn't mean you have to give up your favorite foods. Learn to make trade-offs instead. If you want to indulge in your favorite dessert, enjoy a smaller portion and eat a lower-calorie meal.
- Enjoy more physical activity. As you already know, regular physical activity is important for keeping your heart healthy. Increasing physical activity may help you lose weight and strengthen your heart at the same time.



God's Forever Love

God is always with us during good times and bad times. He wants us to know that. He did not send a Pandemic to destroy the world or to teach the world a lesson. Most likely, the Coronavirus escaped in China and then around the world accidentally. Terrible accidents happen, but what can we do? We can pray and trust that God always loves us and will take care of us.

There is good news in Connecticut. We will be in Phase 3 on October 8. The death rate from COVID-19 is declining in CT. There were only a few deaths in CT lately. There are fewer victims hospitalized. There are a lot less positive test results in the thousands of tests conducted in CT. Around 1% of the tests are positive. There is no shortage of tests, and the results take about one day in CT.

That does not mean that we should relax our standards. Always wear a mask, watch your distance of 6 feet, and wash your hands for at least 20 seconds. As grandma would say, “Use the good common sense that God gave you.”

When our church opens again, we will follow CDC guidelines. Many Fairfield County churches have opened safely. Unfortunately, one Protestant Church in New Haven did not require masks. As a result, there were some cases of the Coronavirus among that church's parishioners.

God will rejoice with us when Salem reopens. In the meantime, He wants us to find something to rejoice about every day. He wants us to stop the hate and the finger-pointing. He wants us to be kind to each other. He wants us to work together to discover solutions. He wants the world to heal just like any loving Father would, but more so.

Carol Lansing, Parish Nurse

Martin Luther's First Posting



BE PREPARED

It has only been a few weeks since Hurricane Isaias left large areas of Connecticut without power for days. We know that disaster like this happen. It's important to be be prepared. Here are some tips to be prepared for an emergency.

A basic emergency supply kit could include the following recommended items:

- Water (one gallon per person per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation)
- Food (at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food)
- Battery-powered or hand crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert
- Flashlight
- First aid kit
- Extra batteries
- Cell phone with chargers and a backup battery

Consider adding the following items to your emergency supply kit based on your individual needs:

- Cloth face coverings (for everyone ages 2 and above), soap, hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes to disinfect surfaces
- Prescription medications
- Non-prescription medications such as pain relievers, anti-diarrhea medication, antacids or laxatives
- Prescription eyeglasses and contact lens solution
- Infant formula, bottles, diapers, wipes and diaper rash cream
- Pet food and extra water for your pet
- Cash or traveler's checks
- Important family documents such as copies of insurance policies, identification and bank account records saved electronically or in a waterproof, portable container
- Sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person
- Complete change of clothing appropriate for your climate and sturdy shoes
- Fire extinguisher
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Feminine supplies and personal hygiene items
- Mess kits, paper cups, plates, paper towels and plastic utensils
- Paper and pencil
- Books, games, puzzles or other activities for children

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

- Install carbon monoxide detectors on every level of your home
- Also smoke alarms should be on each level and in every bedroom and hallways to bedrooms
- Make and share a home fire escape plan
- Choose two places to meet outside your home

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.

The Pandemic and Church Activities

Salem's insurance company requires that everyone who uses the building follow all CDC and federal, state, and local government guidelines regarding health and safety during the pandemic. We are still in Phase 2 in CT, and Governor Lamont recently postponed Phase 3 indefinitely due to a rise in Covid-19 cases nationwide. Phase 2 means that everyone 65 and older and everyone with underlying health concerns – such as cancer, kidney disease, lung conditions, immunocompromised condition, obesity, heart conditions, type 2 diabetes – or those who live with people who fall into these categories, should still be sheltering in place – which means only going out for food or medical reasons. Since nearly all our active members are 65 or older, this means:

Salem will not be gathering indoors for worship as long as we are in Phase 2. Once we are in Phase 3 we will re-evaluate.

Salem meetings will continue on Zoom. Unless there is a need to meet in person (such as the property committee addressing building issues) we will not meet in person.

Other users of the building will be granted access on the condition that they conform to all CDC and federal, state, and local government guidelines regarding Covid-19. The other congregations have a much younger demographic so are not restricted by the sheltering-in-place requirements of Phase 2.

Masks

Masks are required and must be worn correctly so that they cover both the mouth and the nose. If you cannot wear a mask, we ask that you refrain from attending – for your own safety and for the safety of everyone else.

The most effective mask in terms of material is the disposable surgical mask. The virus does not get through that mask although it can escape through the gaps around the edges. To seal up the edges, the most effective means is by tying panty hose around the mask. Bandanas are not very effective. And masks with ventilators protect only the wearer; they offer no protection to others.

Law and Grace

While we all need to do our best to wear our masks properly and to keep at least 6' away from each other, the fact is that many or most of us forget. When people forget, we all need to gently remind them. If we're gently reminded, we should be grateful because the person reminding us is making sure we are all as safe as we can be.

How the virus is transmitted

There are 3 methods of transmission.

While much is still unknown about the coronavirus, it is believed that the primary method of transmission is through **aerosols**. Visualize what happens when you are out in the cold weather and you can see your breath. What you are seeing are the aerosols. Aerosols don't simply drop to the ground but can remain in the air for over a day. Aerosols also don't stay right in front of you. If you're outdoors they move with the wind. Imagine chasing a piece of paper that you've dropped. If you're indoors, they move freely about the room according to the air currents. Imagine the smell of fresh baked bread. The smell doesn't stay by the person holding it. It eventually moves around until everyone in the room can smell it. The aerosols we exhale can contain the tiny virus. That's why it's important to have a mask that is dense enough to prevent its escape through the fabric, and to have a mask that fits tight enough to prevent its escape around the mask. While bandanas do protect from droplets, they do not protect from aerosols.

A second possible method of transmission is through droplets that are emitted when people cough or sneeze. These droplets, however, fall to the ground fairly quickly, so unless you are actually coughed or sneezed on, there is little risk of getting Covid in this way.

A third possible method of transmission is through fomites, objects that are contaminated with the virus. But since the virus does not survive long on human hands, you would have to touch your eyes, nostrils or mouth right after touching a fomite to become infected.

Beginning October 4th, we will have zoom services. If you would like to serve as a leader/assisting minister or as a reader/lector, please let Pastor Marjo know.

Reopening the Building – Assuming CT remains in Phase 3, we are planning to celebrate Reformation Sunday at 9:30 on October 25th with our first indoor in-person worship service since the pandemic closed our building. To have a worship service that conforms with the CDC guidelines will take a lot of work. We will need people to set up the space, people to serve as greeters and ushers, and people to clean the space afterwards. If you are willing to help, please contact Carol Lansing or our Office Manager as soon as possible, as we only have 3 weeks to prepare the space and train the volunteers. Also, please understand that worship in these days of Covid-19 will be very different from what we remember pre-pandemic. Temperature checks, proper masks properly worn, and physical distancing will be required of all participants. Seats will be assigned. There will be no singing or unison choral reading. And communion will be “to go” as at our outdoor worship. But here’s the good news: to cut down on exposure, we’ll be aiming for a 30 minute service!

Salem members and friends, don’t forget to join us for our virtual coffee hour on zoom! Pastor Marjo will join as soon as she can after worship but you needn’t wait for her. Link is [HERE](#) and also on the calendar on our website, salembridgeport.org, under “Resources”. Folks at home can join in of course, and those at worship can join in via the zoom app on their smart phone right from the picnic grove or even on their drive home (safe driving mode hides video but you can still talk and hear).

Summer Stewardship – Even though our building is closed, our ministries (and the expenses to fund those ministries) continue. We are grateful for everyone who continues to give their tithes and offerings to our work here at Salem. We are also grateful to those who have taken advantage of the opportunity to give online, especially to sign up for regular weekly or monthly donations. Every gift no matter how small is appreciated and will enable us to continue to do God’s work in this place. If you’d like help signing up for online giving please do not hesitate to contact Pastor Marjo, Karl, Ray Anderson, Jean Larson, or Nancy Headford.

Game Night! Every Thursday from 6:00-7:00 we gather online to see what the “Gaming Commission” has planned for us. Sometimes we play Bingo or Scattergories. Sometimes we play Headbands or Trivial Pursuit. Sometimes we act out Charades. But ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS, we LAUGH! For more information, speak with Jeanette or her daughter, Lynnette Lawson. Zoom link is available on Salem’s calendar.

Inner-View Chat’n’Chew meets the 3rd Saturday of the month, 11:00-1:00. It’s a time of fun and fellowship that gives us a chance to celebrate the gift that God has given us in one another. Evites are sent out to those on the Genesis mailing list but you can also find the Zoom link on Salem’s calendar.

Health and Safety for those we love – and that means YOU! As we are working very hard to cooperate with city officials and health departments to keep Covid levels low in our state, please remember that unless there is a special need to meet in person, **coffee hour, Bible study, meetings and events will continue to be online only.** Safety protocols (in line with CDC, ELCA, government, health department, and insurance guidelines for all Salem groups and functions) will continue to be recommended by Salem’s Health and Safety Team (Carol Lansing, Eileen Anderson, Dale Danowski, Liz Bales, Nancy Kidwell, and Pastor Marjo) and approved by Salem’s Executive Committee or Council. Even though economic necessity has forced some reopening of businesses, we are in actual fact no safer from the virus now than we were back in March when everything shut down. PLEASE – no matter how safe YOU feel, out of love for one another, wear a mask and physically distance from one another. Thank you!

Need help finding a Salem zoom meeting or need to set one up? Just go to our website at Salem-Bridgeport.org, click on the Resources tab, then on Calendar. On the calendar just find the day and click on the event and a zoom invitation will appear. Sometimes you may have to click on “(+2 more)” in order to see additional vents that don’t fit in the calendar square. 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



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION

Empty pew perks

During the pandemic, online worship reaches new people

By Wendy Healy

As Matthew 18:20 reads: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Lutheran congregations around the country found new meaning in this passage when COVID-19 closed sanctuaries in mid-March.

When faith communities couldn't worship in person, congregations scrambled to stream online worship using Facebook Live, YouTube and other platforms. They also engaged members by emails, texts and phone calls.

Several congregations reported increases in worship attendance through these virtual means, especially during Holy Week and Easter.

Statistics from Barna Group, a California-based faith and culture research firm, give a national perspective. In its article "Current Trends in Virtual Attendance & Weekly Giving Amid COVID-19," Barna reported that 44% of the more than 600 Protestant pastors surveyed said their congregation's virtual attendance was higher than typical in-person Sunday worship attendance.

ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton echoed this in a video message on May 7: "We know that our congregations are now livestreaming worship services—congregations that would never have done that before—and not only reaching their own people, but people who had never come into a church to hear the good news of Jesus are now hearing it and receiving it."

Mike Housholder, a pastor of Lutheran Church of Hope in central Iowa, reported an increase in worship numbers during the pandemic. The congregation has six campuses, and he moved all worship services online in March. "Since then, around 20,000 screens—we aren't sure how many people watch each screen—are tuned in to our livestream services on weekends," he said.

That number grew to 100,000 screens on Easter, said Housholder, who attributes that enormous jump, in part, to the Easter service being broadcast free of charge by the local NBC affiliate in Des Moines, Iowa.

"We enjoyed learning later that Jesus got a higher rating share in Des Moines that morning than all the Sunday news shows," he said.

Broadcasting isn't new to Hope, which has offered weekly online worship services live via HopeOnline.tv. Before the pandemic, Housholder estimates weekly in-person attendance at all campuses averaged more than 13,000 people, with thousands more worshipping online.

"In the future, though, I think weekly worship attendance numbers won't count for much as the world around us continues to change," he said. "We're much more interested in how many people are connecting to the gospel of Jesus Christ through our discipleship classes and groups, serving in ministries and missions, and tapping into our in-person and digital resources, including podcasts, classes, services, devotionals, etc. Weekly worship is just a part of that, not the whole."

Matt Cimorelli, pastor of Lutheran Church of the Reformation in West Long Branch, N.J., also saw success with online worship. Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, he has been using Facebook Live for a Sunday-morning wor-

ship service and a Wednesday-evening service and Bible study.

"It's all done live from my dining room," said Cimorelli, who is assisted by his wife. "We have a paschal candle, prayers, flowers and a bowl for the baptismal font." Cimorelli, who is also a musician, plays guitar and piano during the services.

"I know that we're reaching audiences that we wouldn't normally," he said.

Cimorelli estimates that 40 to 50 users livestream Sunday worship and 15 to 20 livestream weekly Bible study. A Facebook counter tells him the number of devices accessing each event.

Each screen can represent a family of five that is watching worship together, he said, so if 50 screens are tuned in, as many as 250 people could be watching. Cimorelli estimates weekly attendance for in-person services was around 90.

Making the online service intimate was one of Cimorelli's goals. "That's a word that people use to describe worship," he said. "I'm standing 10 feet away from the camera set up on a box in my dining room. I can talk very intimately. The worship feels like family, too, as people greet each other with comments."

Worshippers, he said, will use a happy emoji or will "like" or "share" the service on Facebook.

"At Easter and Holy Week, we had hundreds and hundreds of engagements," Cimorelli said. "It was quite encouraging. My own family from around the country could tune in."

Khader El-Yateem, director for evangelical mission in the Florida-Bahamas Synod, said the pandemic opened new opportunities for the church to adopt a more professional online presence. The synod distributed about \$40,000 in grants to congregations to take online training, build websites, adopt more social platforms, and buy technology and equipment.

"We'd been encouraging our churches to step into the 21st century—to do websites, livestreaming, get on social platforms," he said. "There was some resistance, and now COVID-19 has pushed us to embrace this. Church leaders have had to learn a lot of new skills."

Congregations have also discovered that they're much bigger than their physical size, El-Yateem said, adding, "They've seen an increase in their online participation, and some have seen financial support. I think COVID-19 presented a tremendous opportunity for us to think about what it means to be the church now."

Wendy Healy is a freelance writer and member of Trinity Lutheran Church, Brewster, NY



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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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]."

