



December 2021

the  
SPIRIT

# Salem Lutheran Church

shalom - salaam - salem - peace

*A Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Congregation*

## Preparing for Christmas Might Mean More than You Think

When you think about preparing for Christmas, what comes to mind? sending greeting cards? shopping for presents? baking cookies? bedecking your house? hanging wreaths? wrapping gifts? watching holiday movies? listening to carols? lighting candles? decorating the Christmas tree? Certainly those are the things that our families & friends & society as a whole expect us to be doing. They are the normal, ordinary, routines of what our secular culture calls the Christmas season.

But all of those traditions – as much as we may cherish them – have nothing to do with the real meaning of Christmas. I know that may sound heretical, but think about it for a minute. What are the readings that we hear at worship on these Sundays in Advent? On the first Sunday we hear Jesus saying that “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars and on the earth distress among nations.... People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” [Luke 21:25-26] On the second Sunday, the prophet Malachi laments, “But who can endure the day of his coming? ... For he is like a refiner’s fire.” [Malachi 3:2] Then Luke prepares us for John the Baptist, introducing him as the one who cries in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord!” [Luke 3:4] and then on week three, John bursts onto the stage, shouting, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ... One who is more powerful than I is coming.... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand...and...the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire!” [Luke 3:7,9]

While our secular culture has turned Christmas (both outside and inside the Church) into a sentimental family holiday in the style of a Norman Rockwell painting or a Hallmark Channel movie, that’s not at all what the Bible portrays. Not only do we have John the Baptist screaming at people to repent, Luke begins his narrative by setting the story in its historical context during the reign of Herod. We hear those words as the equivalent of “Once upon a time”, but for those who first heard them, it was more like, “It was one of the darkest times in human history, when one of the most vicious, tyrannical, vindictive men ever to rule on this planet sat on the throne....” It was said that it was safer to be one of Herod’s pigs than one of his sons, and if you were part of the oppressed class of Jews? Well, don’t be surprised if one day he kills all your children just for the fun of it. And then there is the whole story of the birth of Jesus, which we have sanitized and sanctified and set into beautifully carved crèches and cute children’s plays, when it was really about a young, very pregnant girl forced to make a long, danger-

ous, uncomfortable trip on the back of a donkey, to a strange place where there were no older female relatives to deliver her baby, and not even a proper place to stay – just a dirty stable full of stinking animals.

The Biblical story just does not line up with the sentimental celebration we spend so much of our time preparing for. And actually the traditions don’t quite line up either. Christmas wasn’t even celebrated for the first 400 years of Christianity and everything we think of as having Christian symbolism – lights, fire, evergreens, feasts, gift-giving – all have their roots in pre-Christian pagan celebrations. It’s not that Christians sat down to figure out what symbols to use to make this holy day more meaningful. Rather, it’s that Christians simply liked the pagan traditions and so ascribed to them meanings that could pass as “Christian”.

The point here is that what we think of as preparing for Christmas has nothing to do with what God asks of us. John the Baptist tells us to prepare, but he’s not talking about decorating or baking or gift-giving. John tells us we need to prepare two things – the world inside of us – our hearts and minds and spirits and our relationship to God – and the world out there – the things that we think and say and do to testify with our words to God’s love and power in our lives, to serve those in immediate need, and to work for justice and peace so that people are no longer in need.. Christ came to teach us how to live in a DIFFERENT way from everyone else – not adapting to culture, but counter-culturally.

If we want to spend our time and energy preparing for Christmas as the world would have us do, it’s not wrong. HOWEVER, we need to spend at least as much time preparing for Christmas as God would have us do. So this Advent, spend more time in prayer, not simply talking to God, but listening to what God has to say to you. This Advent, spend more time reading and reflecting on God’s Word. This Advent, spend more time worshipping God, not just by showing up at church and going through routine rituals, but by opening up your heart and mind and body and soul and allowing God to transform your entire life. This Advent start each day, not just with opening a window on an Advent calendar, but by saying, “God, I commit this day to you. Take my mind, inform it; take my heart, transform it; take my will, conform it to yours. Prepare me, God, that Christ may be born in my heart this day. Amen”

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](http://www.salembridgeport.org)

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

### Church Office Hours

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

### Worship Services

Sunday 9:30am In Person Worship

### Salem's Staff

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

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

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

## LEADERSHIP AT SALEM

### COUNCIL

Marjo Anderson, Pastor  
Ray Anderson, President  
Tom Larson, Vice-President  
Nancy Headford, Secretary  
Rich Kenyon, Treasurer  
Liz Bales  
Sandra Brown  
John Bryk  
Frank Dukenski  
Steve Kuczo  
Rich Lansing  
Judi Nielsen  
Diane Tomasko

## We Are Grateful



### Capital Improvements

Joan Crossman, Ann Martin (all in memory of Pauline Boyum)

### Food Assistance

Barbara Howard

### Memorial

Ray & Eileen Anderson, Richard & Carol Lansing  
(all in memory of Pauline Boyum)

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

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



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](mailto:salemsec123@sbcglobal.net)



# December 2021

## Salem Lutheran Church



SUN	MON	TUE	WED Dec 1	THU 2	FRI 3	SAT 4
			12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray 6:30pm Bible Study	6pm Cub Scouts - Community Room	6pm Rostered Leaders - God at the Center	9am CPC Christmas party - Hill, Playground, Hall
5 Advent 2 9am Pastor's Zoom Link to Worship 9:30am In Person Worship 10:30am Forward on the FIRST 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 12pm CHURCH 7pm STEPP Group - CR	6 4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on Anti 6pm Boy Scouts - Community Room 6:30pm Social Ministry Committee Meeting	7 9:30am Rostered Leaders' Tuesday Talk and Text 7pm STEPP Group - CR	8 12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray 6:30pm Bible Study	9 6pm Cub Scouts - Community Room	10 6pm Rostered Leaders - God at the Center	11 8am The BREAKFAST Gathering!
12 Advent 3 9am Pastor's Zoom Link to Worship 9:30am In Person Worship 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 12pm CHURCH 3pm CPC Christmas concert - Sanctuary & Nart 7pm STEPP Group - CR	13 4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on Anti 6pm Boy Scouts - Community Room 6:30pm Finance Committee Meeting 7:30pm Executive Committee Meeting	14 9:30am Rostered Leaders' Tuesday Talk and Text 6pm Stewardship Committee 6pm Stewardship Committee Meeting 7pm STEPP Group - CR	15 12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray 6:30pm Bible Study	16 6pm Cub Scouts - Community Room	17 6pm Rostered Leaders - God at the Center	18 11am Inner-View Chat n Chew
19 Advent 4 9am Pastor's Zoom Link to Worship 9:30am In Person Worship 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 12pm CHURCH 7pm STEPP Group - CR	20 4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on Anti 6pm Boy Scouts - Community Room 7pm Council Meeting	21 9:30am Rostered Leaders' Tuesday Talk and Text 7pm STEPP Group - CR	22 12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray 6:30pm Bible Study	23 6pm Cub Scouts - Community Room	24 Christmas Eve 6pm Rostered Leaders - God at the Center	25 Christmas Day
26 Christmas 1 9am Pastor's Zoom Link to Worship 9:30am In Person Worship 10:30am Christ Presbyterian Church 12pm CHURCH 6pm Sunday Night Alive! 7pm STEPP Group - CR	27 4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on Anti 6pm Boy Scouts - Community Room	28 9:30am Rostered Leaders' Tuesday Talk and Text 7pm STEPP Group - CR	29 12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray 6:30pm Bible Study	30 6pm Cub Scouts - Community Room	31 6pm Rostered Leaders - God at the Center	

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



Salem's Annual Seafarers Collection will begin starting on Nov. 1 and run until Dec. 5. We are collecting Woolen Caps, Sweatshirts (L-XL), Thermal or White Socks, T-Shirts (L), Chocolate, Canned Nuts, and Hard Candy. Please place your contribution in the marked box in the Narthex. Also, Cash contributions can be sent to **Ruth Setaro, 33 Valley Brook Lane, North Haven, CT 06473** with a note specifying that it is for the Seafarers and include your name and address. Pastor Ruth Setaro will send you a thank you card for your records.

## Faith Based Initiative Grants

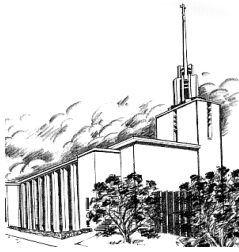
On November 19, 2021 the City of Bridgeport announced the awarding of grants for the American Rescue Plan Faith Based Initiative. Pastor Marjo attended the event and wrote about it.

"What an exciting morning! And what a joy to attend this event! Thank you to the federal government and Senators Murphy and Blumenthal and Congressman Himes for getting money from the American Rescue Plan to the City of Bridgeport and to the city and Mayor Ganim for getting \$400,000 of that money into the hands of faith-based institutions. Much of the money will be used to upgrade online worship services for those who can't attend in person and to reach out beyond our walls to the entire world with a life-transforming message! Speakers at the breakfast this morning included Murphy, Ganim, former state

congressman Ernie Newton, Pr Fred Gee, head of Bpt's Small & Minority Business Enterprise, the Rev Cass Shaw from the Council of Churches of Greater Bpt, and the Rev William McCullough, President of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Greater Bpt and founder of Faith Acts for Education in CT."

Salem was among the awardees, receiving a grant for new sound equipment (a portable system - like the one we've been borrowing to use outdoors, mixer board, house speakers and speaker monitors, handheld and lavalier wireless mics, etc) to be shared with other groups using our sanctuary.





## **Salem Sustainability Task Force SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH**

**Notice of Special Congregational Meeting  
Sunday, December 12, 2021, 10:20 AM**

Looking for a more acceptable outcome, the Salem Sustainability Task Force (SST) reopened the search for a buyer for some or all of the church's real property. The SST once again asked the Reverend Tim Stein from Verse 4 to advise us on an appropriate process. The SST revised the procedure to streamline the process. The SST reestablished a relationship with both George Shawah of Baldwin and Pearson and Daniel Schopick our lawyer of record on the last attempted sale.

After offers from developers and from faith-based organizations, the SST decided that accepting the offer from the Ephraim Seventh Day Adventist church of Bridgeport would best meet the mandate from the Salem membership. This proposal was accepted based on total pricing, ability of buyer to complete the transaction and the closest match to our priorities.

The proposal calls for:

- 1) A sale of the complete property with a closing on or before March 1, 2022 subject to common contingencies regarding title, environmental and financing. Since the buyer is a religious organization, there should be no zoning contingencies.
- 2) Salem will vacate the building on or before the closing date. Additionally, Salem will supply a list of items which they wish to remove from the building.
- 3) Both churches will maintain right-to-cancel the sale at the discretion of their respective general membership.

This proposal does not currently include any provision for Salem to continue worshipping at 3160 Park Avenue. The SST is currently negotiating a rental space in a local church. This will allow further investigation of a permanent new home.

Accordingly, the Salem Council presents the following motion for this meeting.

**Motion: That the Salem congregation accept the proposal herein described and vote to follow through with the transfer of ownership from the congregation to the buyer.  
Further, that the congregation grant and assign the power and responsibility for completion of the process to the Salem Council.**





Five-hundred years ago, Martin Luther published his Commentary on the “Magnificat” or Mary’s Song from Luke 1:46-55. This text was sung or read at every evening prayer for well over a thousand years. It also is a primary reading for worship in the season of Advent. The ELCA Wittenberg Center invites you to a three-part webinar entitled “The Magnificat: Turning the World Upside Down.”

This webinar series—in English with Spanish interpretation—is a collaborative effort across the Service and Justice unit of the ELCA led by the Europe Desk through the ELCA Wittenberg Center. In each of the one-hour sessions, the Director of the Center, the Rev. Dr. Robert Moore will host two guest speakers. Each of the featured speakers will bring a unique perspective to both the biblical text and Luther’s commentary.

### **Wednesday Dec 15: “My Soul Magnifies the Lord: The Gift of Mary’s Voice”**

The Rev. Dr. Wanda Deifelt (Luther College) & the Rev. Heidi Neumark (Trinity Lutheran, Manhattan) will explore the biblical text from Luke, its interpretation, and use over the centuries.

### **Thursday Dec 16: “Brought Down the Mighty from Their Thrones: The Strength of Mary’s Voice”**

The Rev. Dr. Mary Lowe (Augsburg University) & the Rev. Angela Trejo Haager (Lutheran Augsburg Seminary in Mexico) will explore Luther’s Commentary on the Magnificat and the response with the church to the Mary’s song.

### **Friday Dec 17: “From Generation to Generation: The Future of Mary’s Voice”**

The Rev. Dr. Guy Erwin (United Lutheran Seminary) & the Rev. Dr. Mercedes Garcia Bachmann (Institute for Pastoral Contextual Studies of the Lutheran Church in Argentina and Uruguay (IELU)) will explore the implication of the texts for the future of humanity and all creation.

All sessions will be held from 1:00 to 2:00 pm Eastern Standard Time.

Please register in advance. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar. Later, a free copy of Luther’s Commentary on the Magnificat, courtesy of Fortress Press, will be sent to you.

To register go to: <http://bit.ly/MagnificatWebinar>

Join us for what will surely be a great event during the Advent season! We will send a reminder to all registrants.

Grace to you,  
 The Rev. Robert G. Moore, Ph.D.

# WEEKLY AND MONTHLY EVENTS

**Mid-Week Wednesday Worship through Prayer!** If ever we needed prayer, it's now! Agreed? While we can (and should!) pray on our own, scripture teaches us that there is power in group prayer. Jesus says, "I tell you truly that if two of you on the earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven." Author Frank Peretti writes that it is our prayers that empower the angels to fight the spiritual battles which are where the real battles are fought and won. If there is something you or your family or congregation needs, then the more people you have praying for it, the more power that prayer wields. You don't have to pray out loud, if you don't want to, but your presence with us will mean more than you know. So please, join us on **Wednesdays at noon** on zoom for a half-hour as we turn our worries and cares over to the Lord in prayer. The zoom link will be on the calendar on Salem's website at Salembridgeport.org under the Resources Tab. Or you can simply click on [this link](#).

**"Forward on the FIRST" adult forum on zoom!** Now that we are worshipping in-person, we needed to come up for a new plan for adult forum and specifically for our Forward discussions. We realized that not everyone is able or comfortable meeting in person. Plus, since we used to have trouble hearing at Council meetings even when we were sitting side by side(!), trying to hear in the lounge with every one spaced 6' apart isn't going to work. So we want to meet by zoom. Yet as wonderful as zoom technology is, it doesn't work when you have more than one person in a small space on zoom – there's too much sound feedback. So here's the plan: if you want to participate in adult forum, please bring your laptop or tablet or smart phone with you, and after worship, we can spread out into different rooms – lounge, music room, music office, workroom, church office, narthex – or you can sit outside or in your car. For those who prefer, you may stay in the sanctuary and have that be your shared zoom room. And of course for those who are worshipping via Facebook live, simply join from the comfort of your own home – or wherever you are. We are also moving our Forward discussions to the FIRST Sunday of the month, since that follows our Council meeting and will allow us to bring you the most timely information possible. As always, the zoom link will be on the calendar at SalemBridgeport.org/Resources/Calendar. PLEASE JOIN US! :D

**Salem and Friends Prayer Gathering & Take-out Breakfast, sponsored by the Salem Men**, is held on the **2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of the month at 8:00 am**. Although this used to be a men's event, it's now open to everyone, and we are most grateful for the men who sponsor it. (Thank you, Bruce for ensuring that this important time for talking informally about our faith lives continues even in the midst of a pandemic!) It's been outdoors until this month when we met in the lounge. We're working on figuring out how to make the sound work so we can offer this important time on zoom as well.

**Inner-View Chat'n'Chew** meets the **3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of the month at 11:00**, so mark your calendars for **June 19<sup>th</sup>**. 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. The theme for Evites are sent out to those on the Genesis mailing list but you can also find the Zoom link on Salem's calendar.

**There are many ways to find the zoom link for worship and all other Salem events.** The most reliable way is to go to our website - [www.salembridgeport.org](http://www.salembridgeport.org), choose the Resource tab, and click on Calendar. Then on the calendar, go to the day, the event, and when you click on it, it will open up the zoom invitation. You can click on the link, or copy and paste it into your browser. To see how to do this, [click here](#):

We also include the zoom links in our weekly email blasts, and in this announcement section of our Sunday bulletin. You can find links to Sunday worship materials like the bulletin, sermon, and donate page at [www.salembridgeport.org/live](http://www.salembridgeport.org/live). Or to see how to get there, [click here](#):

# Do I have a Cold, Sinusitis, or an Allergy?

We all want to stay healthy for the holidays. Did you know that Christmas trees and decorations can cause an allergic reaction? The culprits are mold and dust. So, do I have a cold, sinusitis or an allergy?

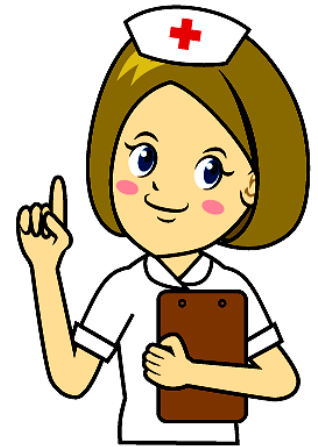
Colds, sinusitis and allergies may start with similar symptoms. Colds and sinusitis are infections caused from a virus or bacteria. Cold symptoms go away quicker even without treatment. Without treatment, sinusitis and allergies will continue to bother you.

A cold is caused by any one of the many viruses. Cold symptoms can be nasal stuffiness, sneezing, runny nose, and sore throat. Usually only infants and toddlers have an elevated temperature with a cold. Other symptoms such as headache, cough, post-nasal drip, burning eyes, muscle aches, or a decreased appetite may accompany a cold. If your symptoms last longer than 7 – 10 days, you may have a sinus infection or allergies.

Acute sinusitis occurs when bacteria infect the sinus cavities. Pollutants, allergies, or a cold cause the sinuses to become inflamed and unable to drain. This can lead to congestion and infection. Chronic sinusitis is when you have frequent sinusitis or when the infection lasts three months or more. If you suspect you have sinusitis, you need to see a doctor for you may need an antibiotic.

Allergies are caused from your body overreacting to common substances such as pollens, food, mold, Christmas trees, decorations, dust, feathers, animal dander, and chemicals. Allergy symptoms can be itchy, watery eyes, nasal and sinus congestion, headaches, sneezing, scratchy throat, hives, or shortness of breath. Try to avoid your allergy triggers and avoid smoking.

Symptoms of a cold or an allergy may be relieved by over-the-counter and prescription medications. Your doctor may recommend antihistamines, decongestants, pain relievers or nasal sprays and to drink plenty of water.



## Handling Your Food Allergies During the Holidays

Christmas and New Years are all about yummy foods. Unfortunately, some delicious treats can make you loved one or you sick. The most common foods that cause allergies are: eggs, cow's milk, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, wheat, fish, and shellfish. See an allergist if any foods cause you to have hives, intestinal problems, itchy, stuffy, runny nose, sneezing, swelling of the tongue, lips, or throat, asthma, or anaphylaxis (a severe allergic reaction).

If a family member or you have been diagnosed with a food allergy, you must use caution when eating. Always have your EpiPen with you. You must avoid the foods that you are allergic to. Carefully check ingredient labels on food products (especially candy wrappers). When eating out, ask the kitchen staff, not just the waiter, what the ingredients are in the prepared meals. You can call ahead to restaurants to find safe foods on their menu. If you go to a party at school or at a friend's house, bring a safe treat or dish with you. Make sure the teachers or hosts know your food allergies. If you accidentally ingest a food that you are allergic to and have an untoward reaction, administer your EpiPen (epinephrine shot) and call 9-1-1. The hospital emergency room will treat your immediate problem and any delayed reaction. Have yummy and safe holidays.



# Covid-19 Symptoms

- ⇒ Fever or chills
- ⇒ Cough
- ⇒ Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- ⇒ Congestion or runny nose
- ⇒ Sore throat
- ⇒ Muscle or body aches
- ⇒ Headaches
- ⇒ Nausea or vomiting
- ⇒ Diarrhea
- ⇒ A loss of taste or smell

## Worship With Us

IN PERSON

FACEBOOK



## Keeping Salem Safe

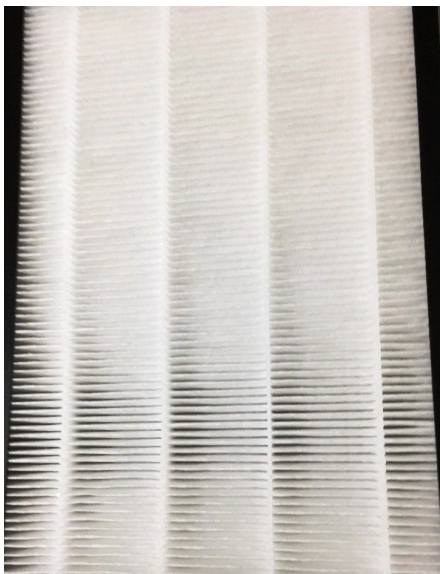
It's hard to believe that the pandemic has been going on for over 1 year and 8 months. The end of it seems to be like one of those mirages in the desert. You see this beautiful vision and hope fills your heart and gives you renewed energy for the journey. And then, when you are almost there, the vision vanishes. We were just beginning to feel safe again when the new omicron variant appears and now we must wait and see how transmissible and how dangerous it might be. In the meantime, scientists and health professionals urge continued caution. And they tell us that the way we can best protect ourselves and our neighbors is to use a multi-pronged approach. There are many things that we can do, but the most important are:

- \* Get vaccinated (unless you have a health condition that precludes it).
- \* Wear a mask in public spaces.
- \* Breathe clean air.
- \* Physically distance as much as possible.
- \* If you have ANY symptoms of illness, isolate until you have tested negative.  
(That cold may not be just a cold –  
and spreading it to an unvaccinated person could be lethal.)

Most of the items on this list are things that you as an individual can do. But since air quality is not something you can control, at Salem we do that for you. We have 3 air purifiers that have both filters and UV light. (If you want to know more than that, ask Bill Winter!) The air cleaners are portable, so can be moved to other rooms if needed.

We purchased one air cleaner initially, but needed two more due to the size of our sanctuary. The money wasn't in the budget, and might have deterred us, but it did not deter God from providing for us. If you never heard the story of that particular miracle or if you've forgotten it, I urge you to read my sermon from November 1, 2020, "I Was Down but God but then God Showed up" at this link: <https://saalembridgeport.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/AllSaints2020IWasDown.pdf>

Since that time our 3 air purifiers have been working hard to keep us safe every Sunday that we've worshipped in the sanctuary -- that is, from Easter through May, a few times when it rained over the summer, and then from September until now -- so about 20 times.



And if you doubt  
whether those air  
cleaners work,  
just look at the  
pictures of the  
new filter versus  
the dirty filter that  
we just replaced.



Please continue to be cautious. You are precious to God, to Salem and to me, and we all want you to be safe. And please continue to thank God – for scientists and researchers, for health care professionals, for our parish nurses, for our sextons, for vaccines, for masks, and for the fact that we are all still here. And thank God once again, too, for our air cleaners!,

Blessings be yours!

*Pastor Marjo*



# Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

**STORIES** OF FAITH IN ACTION

## Songs of Blessings

By Cindy Uken

Adults with intellectual and physical disabilities share their musical talents through the Triangle Alliance Chorus (TAC) at Christ the King Lutheran Church, Cary, N.C. The choir is a “splendid example” to the congregation and community that a person always has gifts to give and share with others, said Mike Harris, TAC director and minister of traditional music at Christ the King.



“TAC demonstrates to us that all of God’s children have value and purpose,” he said. “TAC has been one of the most challenging and more rewarding groups I’ve had the pleasure of working with. I’m sad that we haven’t been able to sing together for over 18 months. I’m eagerly looking forward to the day when it’s safe for us to once again make music together.”

The choir has about a dozen regular members, who include people with cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis and Prader-Willi syndrome, as well as a person who had a leg amputated due to cancer.

Josef Herz-Lane lives with cerebral palsy and sings baritone in the choir. “I, the Lord of Sea and Sky (Here I Am, Lord)” is one of his favorite hymns. “It makes me feel good, and I can inspire other people,” he said. “My mom always says that we are blessed to be a blessing. When I sing with TAC, I’m a blessing to others. People clap and let us know how much they love it. It makes me feel good. I have CP, but that doesn’t stop me!”

The congregation stepped in to become the choir’s administrative sponsor and fiscal agent in 2019 when TAC lost its affiliation with a nonprofit community agency. It seemed a natural fit, as the choir had been rehearsing at the church for several years.

Another reason TAC was a good program for Christ the King to take under its wing is that it complements the PossAbilities Network, its disabilities ministry team.

When Wolfgang Herz-Lane, a pastor of Christ the King, was serving as bishop of the [Delaware-Maryland Synod](#), he and his son Josef started the Definitely-Abled Advocacy and Resource Team (DAART), a synodical program to engage people with disabilities and raise awareness of disability issues. “We came to [North Carolina] and Christ the King in November 2016 and found a need for a similar ministry on the congregational level,” he said.

Christ the King received a \$5,000 grant from the ELCA to help jump-start the ministry. Since then, it has undertaken major renovations to make its campus and building more accessible. The network sponsors an annual “PossAbilities Sunday” in October, has offered a six-week Sunday school class called “Jesus and Disabilities” that is taught by team members and has sponsored several ecumenical prayer services.

Cindy Uken is a veteran, award-winning reporter based in Palm Springs, Calif. She has worked at *USA Today*, as well as newspapers in South Dakota, Minnesota, Montana and California.





Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

# ELCA GLOBAL LINKS

Stay informed. Be inspired. Get involved.

## Skill Development Projects in Ghana

The churches and Christian institutions in West Africa are not sitting on the sidelines as the African continent, like the rest of the world, battles COVID-19. The ELCA has ongoing partnerships with churches and institutions in West Africa, including Good News Theological Seminary, situated in Accra, Ghana.

In addition to providing theological education for the African Instituted Churches (AIC), Good News is also implementing a skills development project to serve Ziopé-Wudzedeke communities in the Volta region.

The project aims to alleviate hunger and poverty and educate farmers on improved agricultural techniques and soil conservation so they can increase their yields. It also trains women in practical skills, such as sewing and African cloth design production, that they can use to support themselves and their families. The project is supported by ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response.

When COVID-19 cases impacted Ghana, the project organizers decided to repurpose its activities to help the community prevent the spread of the virus. In May, the women produced and distributed about 1,300 masks to individuals in their community. The project is also sensitizing people in the community about how they can prevent further infections, distributing more than 1,000 Veronica Buckets (buckets with faucets) so community members have running water to wash their hands.

According to James Akoesheihu, the project field worker, people have expressed their gratitude for Good News Theological Seminary's skills development project, telling him that "the project was blessing their community by doing this selfless work. God should look upon what you're doing and bless you and the people in America for us."



James Akoesheihu is a project field worker for Good News Theological Seminary's skills development project.



This skills development project by Good News Theological Seminary serves Ziopé-Wudzedeke communities in the Volta region of Ghana. The project is supported by ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response.