



July/August 2022

the  
SPIRIT

# Salem Lutheran Church

shalom - salaam - salem - peace

*A Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Congregation*

## How to Save the Church

When we worshipped at Grace last month, Pastor Geoff Sinibaldo taught the little kids the finger play we all learned as children: "Here is the church; here are the people; open the doors, and see all the people!" And that got me thinking... What IS the Church?

I'd like you to close your eyes for just a minute and reflect on that question until you've come up with an answer, before you read any further. So, please, close your eyes and ask yourself, "What is the Church?"

Actually that depends on which Church we are talking about, because there are actually two kinds. So again, before you read any further, ask yourself, "What are the two kinds of Church?"

I'd love to hear your answers to these questions, so please, tell me next time you see me or give me a call or send me a text. But for now, let me share with you what I have learned. There are two different things we may be talking about when we talk about the Church: one is the divine creation, the spiritual entity, the Body of Christ; the other is the human creation, the institution, the organization.

The Body of Christ has to do with our individual spiritual lives and how God brings us together to accomplish the things that God has called us to do that we cannot do on our own. Its governing document is the Bible, and it is comprised of the activities that we do that are unlike the things we do in the rest of our lives – worshipping, praying, witnessing. The human institution of the church has to do with our social lives and how we organize ourselves to work together. Its governing document is our constitution, and it is comprised of groups like council and committees and work groups like our choir and our food pick-up team. These two Churches are not the same, but in a perfect world, they would overlap completely. We don't live in a perfect world, however.

So why am I talking about these two distinct kind of Churches? Because the question that everyone in the Church is asking is, "Why are we dying? What can we do about declining membership? What can we do about our aging demographic?"

Do you remember that survey we took a number of years ago called the Church Assessment Tool? Every congregation that goes through Forward Leadership has to take the CAT. And every congregation looking for a pastor has to take the CAT. And so at this point, with over 50 pastoral vacancies, probably over half of the congregations in our synod have taken it. And while congregations vary in some ways, the one thing that we virtually all have in common is an extremely low score in Spiritual Vitality. Think about that for a moment.... Spiritual VITALITY! That means our spiritual LIFE! And if we are lacking in vitality, if we're lacking in life, then of course we are dying! Having a low score in spiritual vitality didn't really matter back in the '60s or the '70s because society supported all kinds of human institutions and organizations like the church. It was how society was organized. But now that society has

changed, all of those human institutions – whether it be churches, symphonies, choral groups, or the Lion's Club – are dying out. The younger generations don't find our liturgy or our culture or our activities relevant to their lives. Things that once mattered like Lucia programs and craft groups and men's breakfasts no longer attract the general public.

So focusing on the human institution of the church – who is and who is not a member, how many people come in person to worship, how much money people are contributing, how committees are functioning – will do nothing to bring life to a congregation. The human institution of the church – the way it is currently organized, from the denomination to the synod to the congregation – is no longer viable.

Focusing on the spiritual vitality of a congregation, however, WILL save it. Jesus said that He is the vine and we are the branches. If we are truly connected to Jesus through the Spirit, we WILL grow; if we are cut off, we WILL die. And so an easy test to see if we are connected or cut off as a congregation is to simply ask the question: are we growing or dying? Well, we know the answer to that.

The thing is, we don't have to die. The God who created all that is, the God who raised Jesus from the dead, the God who took dry bones and knit them together, clothed them in flesh and breathed life into them, can do the same for us. But it doesn't start with constitutions or councils or committees. It doesn't start with focusing on worship attendance or member giving or revving up committees. It starts with each of us getting reconnected to Jesus, so that when we come to worship we are not just reading or singing the words in the program, but instead our hearts are feeling so overwhelmed with love and gratitude for God that our eyes may fill with tears or we may feel like clapping. It starts with more people from Salem showing up to pray together for an hour on Wednesdays on zoom. It starts with more people from Salem showing up at Bible Study so that we can discern together what God is speaking to us through his Word. It starts with more people from Salem sharing where we are in our relationship with God – whether it's to tell what God has done in our lives recently or to admit we are out of touch and we could really use others to pray for us. It starts with more people from Salem becoming true friends with someone who is of a different race or from a very different kind of church or from a very different economic situation. It starts with focusing first on our relationship to God, then on our relationships with one another, and then on our relationships with those people from outside our congregation that God brings into our lives.

There is absolutely nothing that WE can do to bring life to Salem, but GOD can and will. All we have to do is accept the gift God offers!

Abundant blessings be yours!

*Pastor Marjo*

Pastor Marjo Anderson

## 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

## LEADERSHIP AT SALEM

### COUNCIL

Marjo Anderson, Pastor  
Rich Lansing, President  
John Bryk, Vice-President  
Nancy Headford, Secretary  
Rich Kenyon, Treasurer  
Sandra Brown  
Frank Dukenski  
Steve Kuczo  
Carol Lansing  
Tom Larson  
Cindy Roberts  
Diane Tomasko  
Bill Winter

## Summer Worship

On Sunday July 3rd at 9:30 Salem will be worshipping in the picnic grove at 3160 Park Avenue in Bridgeport, weather permitting. You may want to bring a chair with you.

On Sunday July 10th at 9:30 Salem will be worshipping with Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, 160 Hill Farm Road, Fairfield.

On Sundays July 17th through at least Labor Day Weekend, Salem will be worshipping in the picnic grove at 3160 Park Avenue in whenever weather permits.

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

Barbara  
Bernedette  
Christiane  
Dolores  
Frank  
Grace  
Jonathan  
Linda  
Steve  
and all we name in our hearts.



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

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

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



# July 2022 Salem Lutheran Church



SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI  
Jul 1SAT  
2

3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<b>Pentecost 4</b> ● 9:30am In Person Worship ● 10:30am Forward on the FIRST	<b>Independence Day</b> ● 4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on	● 9:30am Rostered Leaders' Tuesday Talk and ● 12pm Book Club	● 9:30am Bible Study ● 12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray ● 6:30pm Bible Study on ACTS		● 6pm Rostered Leaders - God at the Center	● 8am The BREAKFAST Gathering!
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
<b>Pentecost 5</b> ● 9:30am Worship at Our Saviour's ● 4pm Southern CT Conference COLLABORA	● 4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on ● 6:30pm Social Ministry Committee Meeting	● 9:30am Rostered Leaders' Tuesday Talk and ● 6pm Stewardship Committee Meeting	● 12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray ● 6:30pm Bible Study on ACTS		● 6pm Rostered Leaders - God at the Center	● 11am Inner-View Chat n Chew
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
<b>Pentecost 6</b> ● 9:30am In Person Worship	● 4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on	● 9:30am Rostered Leaders' Tuesday Talk and	<b>Golden Hill Supper</b> ● 9:30am Bible Study ● 12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray ● 6:30pm Bible Study on ACTS		● 6pm Rostered Leaders - God at the Center	
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
<b>Pentecost 7</b> ● 9:30am In Person Worship	● 4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on	● 9:30am Rostered Leaders' Tuesday Talk and	● 12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray ● 6:30pm Bible Study on ACTS		● 6pm Rostered Leaders - God at the Center	
31						
<b>Pentecost 8</b> ● 9:30am In Person Worship ● 6pm Sunday Night Alive!						



# August 2022

## Salem Lutheran Church

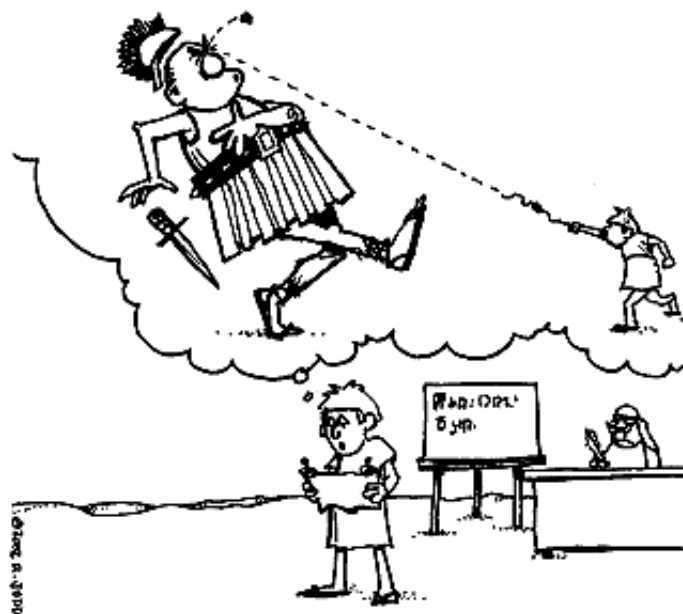


SUN	MON Aug 1	TUE 2	WED 3	THU 4	FRI 5	SAT 6
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9:30am Rostered Leaders' Tuesday Talk and</li> <li>12pm Book Club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9:30am Bible Study</li> <li>12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray</li> <li>6:30pm Bible Study on ACTS</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6pm Rostered Leaders - God at the Center</li> </ul>	
7 <b>Pentecost 9</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9:30am In Person Worship</li> <li>10:30am Forward on the FIRST</li> </ul>	8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on</li> <li>6:30pm Social Ministry Committee Meeting</li> </ul>	9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9:30am Rostered Leaders' Tuesday Talk and</li> <li>6pm Stewardship Committee Meeting</li> </ul>	10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray</li> <li>6:30pm Bible Study on ACTS</li> </ul>	11	12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6pm Rostered Leaders - God at the Center</li> </ul>	13 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8am The BREAKFAST Gathering!</li> </ul>
14 <b>Pentecost 10</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9:30am In Person Worship</li> <li>4pm Southern CT Conference COLLABORA</li> </ul>	15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on</li> <li>6:30pm Finance Committee Meeting</li> <li>7:30pm Executive Committee Meeting</li> </ul>	16 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9:30am Rostered Leaders' Tuesday Talk and</li> </ul>	17 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9:30am Bible Study</li> <li>12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray</li> <li>6:30pm Bible Study on ACTS</li> </ul>	18	19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6pm Rostered Leaders - God at the Center</li> </ul>	20 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11am Inner-View Chat n Chew</li> </ul>
21 <b>Pentecost 11</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9:30am In Person Worship</li> </ul>	22 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on</li> <li>7pm Council Meeting</li> </ul>	23 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9:30am Rostered Leaders' Tuesday Talk and</li> </ul>	24 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray</li> <li>6:30pm Bible Study on ACTS</li> </ul>	25	26 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6pm Rostered Leaders - God at the Center</li> </ul>	27
28 <b>Pentecost 12</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9:30am In Person Worship</li> <li>6pm Sunday Night Alive!</li> </ul>	29 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4pm Southern CT Rostered Leaders Mtg on</li> </ul>	30 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9:30am Rostered Leaders' Tuesday Talk and</li> </ul>	31 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12pm Lord, Teach Us to Pray</li> <li>6:30pm Bible Study on ACTS</li> </ul>			



Cary Andren .....	1
Katherine Horton .....	1
Miriam Llanos .....	3
Karl Kraft.....	4
Katherine Johnson.....	8
Teresa Roehrich .....	8
Dick Bellows .....	9
Jon Baronavski .....	9
Paul Baronavski, Jr.....	9
Annette Marquardt.....	13
Kimberly Sokoloski .....	13
Kevyn Jackman .....	16
JoAnn McMaster.....	16
Laurie Kulakowski.....	19
Anita Papp .....	20
Dolores Kuczo .....	22
Lisette Vazquez .....	22
Victor Ladue .....	23
Ryne Cotter .....	26
Corey DeWalt .....	30

Josephine Anderson .....	1
Gloriana Claus .....	1
Christine Larson.....	3
Janice Lansing .....	6
Morgan Danowski .....	8
Bryan DeWalt.....	8
Cindy Roberts .....	10
Kaitlyn Rosa.....	12
Diane Tomasko.....	13
Carl Roehrich.....	14
Richard Lansing, Jr. ....	16
Mary Anne Caragol.....	18
Evan Lansing .....	18
Brenda Vazquez .....	21
David Schulz.....	23
Jean Larson .....	24
Frank Dukenski.....	25
Sharon Norberg .....	27
Hazel Pasqua .....	29
Eduardo Vazquez .....	30
Joan Crossman.....	31



"How I Spent My Summer Vacation"



On June 26th Salem worshiped with and at Grace Lutheran Church, 150 Chapel Street, Stratford. The day began with a breakfast at 8:30, worship at 9:30, followed by team building activities and a craft, and ended with a barbecue.

Everyone had such a good time at Grace that we've decided to invite both Grace, Stratford and Our Saviour's, Fairfield to worship and fellowship with us at Salem. The tentative date is August 14, and we're looking for people to help us plan the morning. If you can help with food or getting-to-know-you activities, please speak with Pastor Marjo, Sandra Brown, the Lansings, or the Tomaskos.





# Stay Safe in the Sun

1 in 5 Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetime. It is the most commonly diagnosed type of cancer in the US, but also one of the most preventable and can be cured with early detection. There are 3 basic types: basal cell, squamous cell, and melanoma, the most serious.

We all should do regular skin checks, paying attention to changes in any spots or moles - itching, enlarging or changing shape or color. If that happens, you should see a dermatologist.

We should all use a good sunscreen daily on exposed body parts - broad spectrum mineral sunscreens are better than chemical sunscreens; they are made with titanium dioxide or zinc dioxide whose molecules are too large to be absorbed into the body, thus just work on the surface.



As much as possible cover up, especially during peak sun hours of 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. Reapply sunscreen every 2 hours or more often after swimming or sweating a lot.

Also, hydrate skin by using a good moisturizer and drinking lots of water. Both help to regenerate new skin cells.

Just one blistering sun burn as a child can double the risk of developing melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer. 5 or more blistering sun burns at any age can also double the chance of melanoma. Heredity plays a role too.

People still think it is safe to go to tanning salons. It's truly bad for you. Also getting a "base" tan does not prevent you from burning. Dark skinned people are also subject to skin cancers; they may be harder to detect on dark skin as well.

Don't forget to put sunscreen on ears, feet, chest and nose - body parts often forgotten. Wear a hat and sun glasses.

Excerpted from American Way article

## Tips for effective sunscreen use

- Choose a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or Higher
- Apply sunscreen at least 15 minutes before sun exposure
- Use enough sunscreen to cover your whole body (about an ounce for most adults), and apply it to all exposed areas, including ears, scalp, tops of the feet and legs
- Ask someone else to help you apply sunscreen on hard-to-reach spots like your back
- Reapply sunscreen at least every two hours, or immediately after swimming or sweating

# 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*



# WALK THE WALK 2022

Be part of a HUGE community of people walking for Calumet by signing up for Walk the Walk 2022. It's easy! Everyone who registers (dogs are welcome, too) joins a team. Lots of Congregations will have their own Congregation teams (last year, there were about 70 congregations teams). One person from the congregation will serve as team Captain collecting miles periodically from all the team Members ... and then the Captain will report the total miles of the whole team to Calumet. It is wicked easy.



A Calumet team might be a good option for people who aren't connected to a congregation. There are many fun options available. There are lots of great Calumet teams like Team Campfire, Team Outdoor Chapel, Team Ice Cream Social, Team Jackman Ridge, and more. See the list when you register and pick a team that seems like it's a good fit for you.

Each team will have a Captain. We hope those serving as team Captains in 2021 will volunteer to do it again. Congregations organizing a team for Walk the Walk 2022 will want to identify one person who can serve as Captain. It's not a wicked hard job, by any means. But it's best if the Captain is good at sending, checking, and reading their emails.

During the summer you'll be contacted by your team Captain who will ask you, "Hey, I'm going to report our team's mileage so far this summer. How many miles have you logged?" team members will be expected to log their miles four times throughout the 62 days of July and August. Mileage from July 1-15 will be submitted to Captains beginning on July 16. Mileage from July 16-31 will be submitted beginning August 1. Mileage trekked between August 1-15 will be shared with the Captain starting on August 16. And miles from August 16-31 will get to the Captain on September 1.

As the summer progresses, Calumet will hear from team Captains who will be able to report their team's mileage through a wicked easy Google Form (thanks to Amy Gillam O'Riley for her awesome leadership with this). Calumet will share the growing mileage total all summer long. The goal: 350,000 miles by the end of the day on August 31!

Calumet has a special Walk the Walk Facebook page which participants all over the place are invited to join. Though out the summer, there will be daily devotions, fun contests, photo sharing, and more. This Facebook group has been a fantastic way for people to get to know one another. We have a specific group of people led by Pat Mahoney with the job of managing the page and encouraging awesome connections -- a la Calumet Nation! Registration Starts on May 15, 2022! The registration fee is a \$25 donation to Calumet.

Click here to register for [WALK THE WALK!](#)

Join the WALK THE WALK! [FaceBook group.](#)

Save the Date

**October 27 – 29, 2022**

**New England**

Women<sup>of the</sup> **ELCA** 

**Biennial Convention and Gathering**

**Camp Calumet, Freedom, NH**



*Come with your stories and/or come to listen to other's stories.  
Come and share the Love and/or come to be loved, give love or  
Just Love.*

*... and leave to share the love and tell the stories.*

**1 John 4:19 – we love because he first loved us**

Ade Monareh – 603-866-6556 or [ade234@msn.com](mailto:ade234@msn.com)



# WEEKLY AND MONTHLY EVENTS

**Welcome to WONDROUS WEDNESDAYS!** On Wednesday we have 3 wonderful opportunities to live into our mission of Encountering God, Building Relationships, and Changing Lives. The links are all on the calendar on our website at [SalemBridgeport.org](http://SalemBridgeport.org) under the Resources Tab.

**\* First, on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays of the month through June, we begin with a Morning Bible Study 9:30-11:00 on zoom, led by Grace Dukenski.** There is time for sharing before we launch into our study of the book of Galatians, and time for prayer at the end.

**\* Every Wednesday at 12:00 noon we meet on zoom for prayer.** You can pray out loud if you want, or you can simply ask others to pray for you or for the concerns on your mind or heart. The more we talk with God and the more we listen to God, the more God is able to work through us. And the more we pray TOGETHER the more the power of prayer is multiplied.

**\* And finally, every Wednesday at 6:30 pm we conclude with an Evening Bible Study 6:30-7:30 on zoom, led by Pastor Marjo and Jeanette Harris.** Join this diverse and interesting group of people for a study that is not simply informational but transformational. We continue our study of the book of Acts, concluding at 7:15 with a brief service of Holy Communion.

**The next breakfast and faith discussion will be held on June 11th at Grace Lutheran Church, 150 Chapel Street, Stratford, at 8:00 (7:00 to help cook).**

**Please join Jeanette Harris and Genesis Gospel Café at the next Inner-View Chat'n'Chew, Saturday June 18th at 11:00 am.** Details forthcoming.

**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](#):**





# Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

**STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION**

## Growing community

*New mission takes root in solar-powered town*  
By Karris Golden

The Community Church (TCC) is new in the rapidly growing town of Babcock Ranch, Fla. So is everyone else.

Home construction in Babcock Ranch, the nation's first city built to run entirely on solar energy, began in 2016, with residents arriving a few years later. By March 2022, the population had hit 10,391, with developers planning for 50,000 residents.

TCC, a synod-authorized worshipping community, planted seeds in Babcock Ranch in fall 2020. Worship services quickly outgrew the community center, so the pastor, Matt Shapton, moved them to his house.

"We take all of our furniture out of our home on Saturday evenings," he explained. "Volunteers help us set up chairs. . . . We can fit about 60 people in our house." He described the service as fun and chaotic. "It's becoming a big part of our story," he said. "People now say to me, 'We're really going to miss it when we do have a church, because I love being in your house.'"

Members Lisa and Tom Hall have been with TCC since its beginnings. "There's not a building, but there is a church here," Lisa said. "The church is the people. It's social, too, because they're gathering with friends around shared needs and values. We're meeting people where they're at."

Services move outdoors when the weather permits. "It is so exciting to see so many new faces every week," Tom said. "No matter how many chairs we put out, we need our lawn chairs, too, because we always seem to underestimate how many people will come."

In keeping with the principles of the developing, eco-conscious community—and with ELCA emphases—TCC uses earth-friendly, reusable resources. "This is a brand-new city—a master-planned community," said Shapton, who is serving his first call at TCC. "Creation care is at the heart of everything in Babcock Ranch."

The concept took shape in 2006 with the purchase of 91,000 acres in southwest Florida's Charlotte and Lee counties. Developer Kitson & Partners immediately sold 73,000 acres to the state and Lee County in the single largest land-preservation project in state history.

Kitson plotted the city on the remaining land: a blend of residential and commercial spaces and 880 acres of solar fields. The businesses, homes and entertainment venues are designed to attract residents who are passionate about stewardship and sustainability. One thing it doesn't include, Shapton noted, is houses of worship.

"Coming from the Midwest—where, if you're going to build a town, one of the first things you do is build a church—church is not on their radar here," explained Shapton, a Michigan native. "So, we have created that desire for them and shown them the value of what faith community is. We're trying to provide what a church provides the best way we can."

TCC's approach blends tradition and innovation. Shapton intentionally chose the church's name to convey an openness to all, regardless of previous backgrounds and experiences.

The congregation has already made a mark. "It was the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, and people weren't going to church in person," Lisa said. "Pastor Matt was out there with his golf cart parked in Founder's Square, handing out communion. It was without judgment or 'Oh, do you qualify to take communion?' It was there for anyone who came by. That was new for a lot of people." This episode introduced Shapton to the community, she added, long before TCC's first worship service.

Shapton also organized service projects and advertised them to residents through social media. "Instead of leaning into liturgy and worship, we actually leaned into building community first, through supporting local nonprofits," he explained.

TCC now coordinates service opportunities at such area institutions as Crossroads Hope Academy, a foster care program; Valerie's House, which offers grief-support programs to children and families; and South West Florida Horse Rescue, which saves horses from abuse, neglect and slaughter. In addition, TCC's popular monthly community cleanup is endorsed by the Homeowners Association.

Meanwhile, TCC's worship sprang from its community-wide services for Easter and Christmas. "It's bringing what people know of church from the previous towns to this new city, because it's not here," Shapton said. "A lot of people have kind of fallen out of the rhythm of their faith practices. We're trying to reset that rhythm by being the church presence they're familiar with, but at the same time open them up to some new possibilities of worship."

In recent months, TCC began sending financial contributions to the Florida-Bahamas Synod, Lisa said, adding, "That was very important to us—a way to show we're committed. We're grateful for the support we've received from the synod and mission funds as well as individual congregations."

Shapton, a Navy veteran and a building contractor before he attended seminary, draws on all his past experiences. "Nothing I'm experiencing is what I learned of or was exposed to," he said. "I didn't learn how to start a new congregation in a new city where there are no other churches; it is a learn-as-you-go opportunity. Every mission start comes with an unexpected element."

"Seminary gave me a good foundation and tools for community-driven ministry. . . . Starting small businesses has been useful experience. It's not just about worship; it's about starting the entity that is the church."

Karris Golden is a professional writer-editor and a member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Cedar Falls, Iowa.



## Middle East and North Africa Ministries

The Middle East/North Africa (MENA) area desk has been working with regional partners on some exciting new ELCA-supported programs. In Lebanon, the MENA desk has helped the Contact and Resource Center (CRC), a Christian organization serving disabled adults, to break ground on a new farm and guesthouse that will employ adults with disabilities and bring in revenue to support the CRC's ongoing work. In Jerusalem, the MENA desk is supporting the Lutheran World Federation affordable housing project, which will soon begin construction in Beit Hanina. The ELCA also continues to accompany our partner church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, as it ministers to members and neighbors at a time when the perseverance of the Palestinian Christian community is being tested by the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing occupation, and increases in violence and harassment. In Cairo, St. Andrew's United Church of Cairo and St. Andrew's Refugee Services continue a growing ministry of service to refugees.

Two new missionary couples have been welcomed to the region: the Rev. Cory Driver and Sarah Driver are assigned to Cairo, where Cory serves as director of graduate programs for the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, and the Rev. Jordan Miller-Stubbendick and the Rev. Adam Miller-Stubbendick will serve in Jerusalem as country coordinators for the Jerusalem/West Bank YAGM (Young Adults in Global Mission) program, which is scheduled to resume this year.



Bishop Ibrahim Azar celebrates his fourth anniversary as bishop of the ELCJHL in January.



Local schoolchildren learn about bird migration at the ELCJHL's Environmental Education Center.