



Upstate New York Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

September 6, 2020

AN OCCASIONAL LETTER

Sisters and Brothers, Siblings in Christ,

Grace to you and peace from the One who makes all things new, Jesus Christ our Lord.

It has been a while since I last wrote to you and as things have changed a bit and the influence of Covid-19 infiltrates our lives and society in ways never imagined, I wanted to take a few moments to share some thoughts and invite you to gather with me for conversation.

Did I say it's been a while since I wrote? I think I did. Just a heads up, this letter is a bit long but it has all the news that's fit to print so please bear with me on this one.

ANXIETY RISING

First of all we know too well that living in these days means living in a number of layers of anxieties, anxieties that effect each of us in different ways. There is anxiety regarding finances, racism, a presidential election cycle, congregational challenges and a number of others. Experts tell us that the use of medications and visits with therapists has risen exponentially in the past months.

In an article posted by the CDC (August 14, 2020) entitled "Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic" the article suggests: "Communities have faced mental health challenges related to COVID-19-associated morbidity, mortality, and mitigation activities.

"During June 24–30, 2020, U.S. adults reported considerably elevated adverse mental health conditions associated with COVID-19. Younger adults, racial/ethnic minorities, essential workers, and unpaid adult caregivers reported having experienced disproportionately worse mental health outcomes, increased substance use, and elevated suicidal ideation."

These realities affect all people, including and perhaps to a greater degree, those in what are considered the helping professions which includes you and me. I know in talking with pastors and colleagues across this church this is a growing challenge we face. I don't have answers for it, perhaps a few suggestions, but I would like to have a conversation around this topic and what you see from your perspective.

I can tell you that the incidence of pastors resigning from calls due to stress and pressure in congregations to open when safety precautions are not put in place or ignored is on the rise. I have worked with three of these in the past three months and more are on the horizon. In a conversation with colleagues in Region 7 this afternoon, information was shared about pastors who are retiring or resigning because they have said “It’s just not worth it.” It is a growing reality and we need one another especially in these times.

If you are so inclined, I’m inviting you to meet on Zoom in the coming weeks just to talk. This is not about a massive therapy session, it’s about learning from one another, sharing our stories and finding ways to move forward in what are more than challenging times.

Conversation with Bishop Macholz
Sep 23, 2020 11:00 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)
Sep 30, 2020 11:00 AM

Please download and import the following iCalendar (.ics) files to your calendar system.
Weekly: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/tZYvdOuurTspHtATb1W-7b6o1MAGs9FeisD7/ics?icsToken=98tyKuGqrDgoHNeVsx2DRpwQAIjCa-7ztmJegr8qB20NG0EYFX5Z89jFaEmNt3Z>

Join Zoom Meeting
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82232630344>

Meeting ID: 822 3263 0344
One tap mobile
+16465588656,,82232630344# US (New York)
+13017158592,,82232630344# US (Germantown)

To begin the conversation, I encourage you to read the following article entitled “Too Many Pastors Are Falling On Their Own Swords.” It is insightful, frightening and helpful. It comes from Baptist News Global. Even if you choose not to join in the conversation I think the article is worth reading and even more than that, it’s worth sharing with your leadership and congregation. Tell them the Bishop strongly suggests they spend ten minutes with it. I’ll be inviting congregational leaders to a meeting in the coming weeks as well and sharing the same article with them.

<https://baptistnews.com/article/too-many-pastors-are-falling-on-their-own-swords/#.XzyCXCRq0IS>

REOPENING RUMINATIONS

I’m also interested in learning what you are learning as you either reopen or plan to reopen. I know that some congregations have been open for quite a while. In most cases those communities of faith have smaller numbers and larger spaces that allow for following the protocols and in some instances are in parts of the state where the virus has



not been all that pervasive. I also know that some congregations are indicating they are not opening until mid-September or October and yet others not until after the first of the year. In each of these situations there is uniqueness and there are consequences. I'd like to learn about those. Please take the time to fill it out the Google form below, even if you can't make the time for conversation:

<https://forms.gle/oMwAi73eedrN8ffo9>

During our time together we will have a brief devotional, spend some time in break out rooms in small groups and work as a large group. It will be a time to share our stories, be with colleagues and learn from one another. I hope you can make it. (The dates for the meetings and the Zoom link are found above.)

SYNOD MINISTERIUM

On a more calming note Synod Ministerium is fast approaching on October 5th and 6th. It will be a virtual gathering. Pete Reuss of GSB will be with us to encourage, equip, and inform on all things financial vitality. Gain both confidence and tools to shape your work and develop a culture of faithful stewardship within your community. I think this is especially critical in this season as we focus on stewardship in the congregation and elsewhere. Here's the link for more information and to register:

<https://upstatenysynod.org/new-events>

In conjunction with this, on Sunday evening at 7, October 4, we will gather across the synod via Zoom for worship: "Vineyard People: Prayer, Song and Reflections on Lament and Hope"

Zoom link for worship:

(<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86575479673?pwd=dmxpd1IzTWE1RDlsb1luRk4yRFZmZz09>)

Meeting ID: 865 7547 9673

Passcode: 366340

And YouTube Live (<https://YouTube.com/UpstateNYSynodELCA>)

This service is intended to be opening worship for the Ministerium and invites all in the synod to join in.

ODDS AND ENDS

In a separate email coming your way will be information regarding "Option 4 and Home Communion" in a time of Pandemic. I apologize for the lateness of this knowing that for some it is no longer useful but it has been a struggle to finalize.



I do hope that you are well and surviving. There is much that weighs us down discovered in these past six or so years, I mean months. There is also much we have learned and there have been many blessings and joys along the way as well. I work to focus on the blessings and joys while dealing appropriately with the challenges. Know that you are in my prayers and thoughts and have been. I don't envy the calling you serve in these days, it is flat out hard and sometimes impossible. But I do know that the One who called you will continue to give you the strength and courage to meet the days ahead and all they hold in store.

Lest I forget, the following are names and email addresses for the newly ordained and those about to be ordained in our synod. I think they would be deeply appreciative if you could take a moment and send them an email of congratulations and encouragement.

Miranda Hammer	July 18	pastormirandahammer@gmail.com
Community of Good Neighbors-SAWC in East Buffalo, NY		
Rick Mollenkop-Grill	August 22	rickmgrill@gmail.com
Trinity Lutheran Church in Akron, NY		
Sohail Ahktar	September 5	rimsha77@hotmail.com
First English Lutheran Church, Lockport and Saint Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church, Medina		
Wayne Shipman	September 12	wshipman2020@gmail.com
Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd-Pocatello and Emanuel Lutheran Church-Blackfoot, Southeast Idaho, Northwest Intermountain Synod		
Susan Salome	November 7	pastorsusan@twcny.rr.com
St. Michael, Camillus		
Rob Allport-Cahoon	October 31	allportcahoon@gmail.com
Bethel, Jamestown		

One final note, I am deeply grateful for the good work you do in the midst of it all. You are a blessing to me, to those you serve and to this church. Please hear that clearly and deeply, you are a gift and grace to many.

In Christ's Peace and Hope,



John S. Macholz, Bishop

