

Pentecost 24 Leadership Letter, November 15, 2020

To members of our Zion family,

On Wednesday, Nov. 11th, we recognize Veterans Day and say thank you to the men and women, both of today and generations past, that have served our country in the armed services. We are grateful for their service and sacrifices made to protect our country and guarantee our freedom. We recognize and thank members of Zion's congregation: Bob Loomis, Chuck Carlson, Fran King, Lloyd McLennan, Russ Holzberger, Shirley Eadline, and all the others who have served. Make sure to thank a veteran when you next have the chance!

Announcements and Updates:

Worship Services on Sundays at 10:00 AM and **Christmas Eve:**

-This Sunday we will continue our remote worship practice, offering the opportunity to attend the service via Zoom, livestreamed on Facebook, or by using the **printed Service of the Word**, which you will find later in this mailing.

-To join **this Sunday's service via Zoom**, same log-in info as last week:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84354840714?pwd=TDJGTkwvSTBER2lNb1o1Qzd6WGxDdz09> Meeting ID: 843-5484 0714, Password: 022654. Or by PHONE, 6465588656, 84354840714#, 1#, 022654

-If you would prefer to **view the service via livestream** on our YouTube channel, you can do so by visiting our page at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWzOtbCe2z7-bIPvxp62IA>

-Our **next in-person Sunday worship will take place on Nov. 22nd @ 10:00AM**, the Sunday prior to Thanksgiving. Additions to this service from our first in-person worship **will include communion and the congregation reciting together and aloud The Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed**. Cushions have been returned to the pews.

-Zion will be offering a **Christmas Eve service at 8:00 PM via Zoom**, led by Rev. Janet Hoover. Look for details in the leadership letters following Thanksgiving.

-The Red Cross will be holding a **Blood Drive at Zion on Saturday, Nov. 21st**, from 9-1. The first two blood drives at Zion were a great success and the Red Cross especially appreciates the large space in our Fellowship Hall to ensure physical distancing. We are grateful to Cheryl Edmiston for stepping up to serve as a Zion's liaison with the Red Cross. If you would like to donate, you can make an appointment to give blood at: <https://www.redcrossblood.org/> give. Let's continue to support the health of our community during these critical times!

-Zion's **church council met on Monday, Nov. 9th**. The agenda included a review of Zion's finances and the process for creating the budget for the 2021 calendar year, along with discussions of our plans regarding worship services in 2021 and the call process.

-As a reminder, the **Social Ministry Committee is continuing three Zion holiday traditions** this year despite the pandemic limitations: providing **Food Baskets** for the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, the **Angel Tree** to benefit the Thea Bowman House, and the **Mitten Tree** to provide handmade and store bought hats, gloves, mittens, and scarves for the needy. This year we are asking you to send financial contributions for the Food Baskets and Angel Tree project—please include these in your weekly/monthly offerings with an indication of the amount for these traditions. If you would prefer to provide gift cards for the Angel Tree project, we recommend they come from Walmart or Target. Mitten Tree donations, which will be given to residents of Johnson Park, can be dropped off at the designated bin in the downstairs coatroom. Thank you for your generosity directed toward those having an even more difficult time this year due to pandemic-related challenges.

The **Stewardship Committee** will be contacting all Zion congregants in the week prior to Thanksgiving. We will be asking you to consider your commitment of financial support, along with your time and talents, to help us carry out Zion's mission. In order to realize our goals and aspirations, the support of all members of our Zion family would be invaluable.

We ask for your **continued prayers for Norm and Patsy Glista, Fran and Claudia King, and Rusty and Bill Pentland**. If you'd like to send a card or note, here are the addresses:

Norm and Patsy Glista
287 Main St.
New York Mills, NY 13417

Fran and Claudia King
104 College St.
Clinton, NY 13323

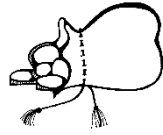
Rusty and Bill Pentland
2160 Bleeker St., Apt. B130
Utica, NY 13501-1747

We continue to look for members of the **congregation interested in serving as a member of our church council** and invite your expression of interest. Council members serve three-year terms. We seek four new council members starting in February. If you have never served on council before, this would be a great time to start! We ask all Zion congregants to seriously consider serving on council. We need your help and support. Please contact the nominating committee members: Jeanne Gymburch (jgymburch@aol.com), Kim Ritchie (kimritchies@yahoo.com), Michele Lasher (michlsh@aol.com), or Mark Thompson (mdthompsonphd@gmail.com).

In his sermon this past Sunday, Rev. Eldon DeWeerth reflected on the Old Testament reading from the Book of Amos. The text presents the story of a family divided, imploring them to come together again. Rev. Eldon shows us how that call has been heard again and again across history. John Donne, the renowned English poet, wrote "No man is an island." Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoevsky, wrote "Everyone is really responsible to everyone for everyone and for everything." Seems like a tall order. Rabbi Hillel, the Elder, challenged the people of his time in ancient Babylon. Loosely translated, Hillel's message was this—"If not you, who? If not now, when?" Let us follow the call of Amos, Donne, Dostoevsky, and Rabbi Hillel. The time for healing and coming together is now. Let's all do our part.

The peace our loving God be with you all,
Mark Thompson and Kristen Burson, church council co-presidents

Pentecost 24



SERVICE OF THE WORD
GATHERING

WELCOME

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be the Holy Trinity, ☩ one God, in whose image we are made, who claims us and calls us beloved. **Amen.**

Holy One,

We confess that we are not awake for you. We are not faithful in using your gifts. We forget the least of our siblings. We do not see your beautiful image in one another. We are infected by sin that divides your beloved community. Open our hearts to your coming, open our eyes to see you in our neighbor, open our hands to serve your creation. Amen.

Beloved, we are God's children, and Jesus, our Beloved, opens the door to us. Through ☩ Jesus you are forgiven, by Jesus you are welcome, in Jesus you are called to rejoice! Let us live in the promises prepared for us from the foundation of the world. **Amen.**

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

Alleluia! Christ is risen. **Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism, we are raised with him to new life. Let us give thanks for the gift of baptism. We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning you created us in your image and planted us in a well-watered garden. In the desert you promised pools of water for the parched, and you gave us water from the rock. When we did not know the way, you sent the Good Shepherd to lead us to still waters. At the cross, you watered us from Jesus' wounded side, and on this day, you shower us again with the water of life. We praise you for your salvation through water, for the water in this font, and for all water everywhere. Bathe us in your forgiveness, grace, and love. Satisfy the thirsty and give us the life only you can give. To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn As *Saints of Old*, #695, Verses 1 & 2 —Mary Senn

Vs. 1 As saints of old their first-fruits brought of orchard, flock, and field to God, the giver of all good, the source of bounteous yield, so we today first-fruits would bring, the wealth of this good land, of farm and market, shop and home, of mind and heart and hand.

Vs. 2 A world in need now summons us to labor, love, and give; to make our life an offering to God, that all may live. The church of Christ is calling us to make the dream come true: a world redeemed by Christ-like love; all life in Christ made new.

Prayer of the Day

Righteous God, our merciful master, you own the earth and all its peoples, and you give us all that we have. Inspire us to serve you with justice and wisdom and prepare us for the joy of the day of your coming, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

THE WORD

First Reading: Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

Sermon: *God's Investment Policy* —Pr. Janet Hoover

Here we have another one of those troubling parables. I don't know about you, but I feel sorry for the third servant. After all, what did he do that was so wrong? He didn't steal any of the money, he was just careful to protect it. Why should he be penalized for his prudence? If I were in his place, I would probably act in a very similar manner. I have a set of heirloom china that I only use on special occasions. I have a set of lovely stationery I saved for special letters— saved so long that it is yellowing and not quite so lovely. Most of us can understand the third servant's response because we too are prudent and hesitant to waste what we have. That's why the ending of darkness and teeth gnashing is so horrific, an overly harsh and

frightening judgment on one who is simply cautious and careful. Let's look again at what happens. A master is preparing to leave on an extended trip. Just before his limo arrives, he calls his three servants to his side. I'm leaving, he said. I don't know when I'll return. While I'm gone, I have something for each of you to do. The servants probably expected a list of chores ranging from walking the dog to cleaning the pool. Instead, the master hands each of them a bag. Take care of this, he said. Imagine their surprise when they opened the bags and realized that each of them holds a small fortune in cash, for a talent was the equivalent of 20 years' wages for the average worker. Even the man receiving only one is the recipient of an amazing trust. It's as if the master handed them the key to the Cadillac, the combination to the safe, the pin number for his ATM card, and the password to his computer. All his assets are handed over, and then, with no further instruction or advice, he leaves. Time passes. Two of the servants plunge right into the task. They work, and let's face it—no one doubles a fortune without some risky investments. But they believe that the master wants them to do something productive with what he has given them, so they accept the challenge with energy and courage. The third servant handles things differently. He is given a fortune, but the responsibility frightens him. Afraid to make a mistake, afraid that he will be found incompetent or foolish, he responds not with joy but with timidity, burying the money away where it will be safe until the master's return. Years go by, and then, at last, the master returns. And, as would be expected, he calls for an audit of the books. The two servants who have increased the wealth are commended for their work. But when the third servant comes with his talent clutched in his fist, muttering, "Here. I took care of what you gave me just like you asked. You can have it back now.", the master seems to explode with anger. Why this violent reaction? As Tom Long writes: "Up to this point in the parable, there is no basis whatsoever for the depiction of the master as a harsh man. Instead, the master has been generous and understanding. He has entrusted his slaves with vast amounts of money—not just to carry to the bank for him, but to handle for an extended period of time. Moreover, in a culture where slaves were expected to do their duty without receiving praise, pats on the back, or brass plaques...astonishingly, this master gives them extravagant tribute, increased authority, along with the implication that they get to keep the money." Everything in this story leads us to see the master as an extraordinary man—trusting, welcoming, generous. That at least is the way the first two servants view him, otherwise they would not have been so free to take the risks they did. But the third servant misses all the joy and generosity. He is so imprisoned by his fears and doubts and insecurities, so overwhelmed by a fear of failure, that his vision is distorted. All he can see is darkness, and the darkness finally engulfs him. The master, who has demonstrated trust and faith in the servant, is repaid by fear. His harsh words of rejection may simply be a reaction to the rejection he feels. "You think I'm so bad? You think I'm formidable and exacting? Then I guess you don't want to be around me—so go from here." Again, from Tom Long: "The tragic news of this parable is that the one-talent man pronounces his own judgment. He gets only the master his tiny and warped vision can see. The story is not about a generous master suddenly turning cruel and punitive. It is about living with the consequences of one's own faith. If one trusts the goodness of God, one can boldly venture out with eyes open to glimpses of grace, know that risks and mistakes are part of the adventure, but that God is always there to work in and through it all. To be a child of the generous, gracious, and life-giving God, yet to insist on viewing God as oppressive and harsh, is to live a life that is impoverished. Those who live in the confidence that God is trustworthy and generous will find more and more joy and grace and mercy. But as for those who tremble with anxiety lest they be branded a failure, well...they condemn themselves to a life spent cowering under the bed—quivering in needless fear."

This parable is not about how we are to handle our money. It is about abundance and grace, gift and trust. The master trusts his servants and acts on this trust. Two of the servants return the favor by themselves acting out of trust, and their lives overflow with goodness. The third servant is motivated by fear. He seeks to avoid any chance of failure by doing nothing, and he finds himself in the darkness watching the celebration his own fears have kept him from participating in. All too often we stand beside him. Not just because we don't use our grandmother's china, but because we allow our own sense of inadequacy to keep us from plunging into life with joy and energy. We have so many excuses. I'm not smart enough. I'm too young. I'm too old. I'm too tired. And God says: Don't you understand? I need you—right now—just as you are—to be a witness of my love. To move from the shadowy world of self-protection out into the pain and struggle of this world. I need you to speak words of love, to embrace the lonely, to risk your time and energy for the sake of my kingdom. Like the three servants, we have been entrusted by God with gifts—amazing, incredible gifts. There are the gifts we all have: the gift of time—1440 minutes a day to savor the beauty of nature, the joy of friends and family, to eat and sleep and laugh and rest and work. The gift of life itself—a constantly changing, unfolding movement of learning and growth, a gift which doesn't end when we take our last breath, but which will continue to be ours even as we move from death to new life. There are also the specific gifts which we have been given—the ability to paint or sing or write or repair things, the ability to make sense of a

financial statement, or a passage of scripture, the knack of listening or praying or speaking. We live in a world where it is tempting to take what we have and bury it deep in the ground, where no one can disturb it. It is tempting to close the door to our hearts and pull the curtains so no one can ask anything of us. We live in a world where people take advantage of our generosity, where mistakes are made. To participate in the dance is to risk looking foolish or falling flat on our face. This parable calls us to look beyond that to the reality that God holds out a world where men and women and children can use their gifts in creative and life-enhancing ways. Every human life begins with a coin—a life to be lived. The size of the coin varies according to the circumstances of the life into which we are born, the setting in which we live out our lives. But we're all given a gift beyond imagining, and all we are told is to do something with it—trusting that what we do makes a difference. Trusting that God will be with us rejoicing in our successes and picking us up and bandaging our wounds if we trip and fall—asking only that we trust enough to live out our love by loving others. We have been given hands to help and heal, minds to dream and imagine, ears to listen, voices to sing and speak, hearts to love. Now God says—Let's see what you can do! This time of year, we are often reminded that the church needs our gifts of money to keep the ministry and mission going. And that is even more important in these difficult days. But the story of the talents reminds us that God wants more. God wants us. God needs the work we can do, the love we can share. One of the most powerful scenes in the movie *Chariots of Fire* is a conversation between Olympic runner Eric Liddel and his sister. She is disturbed by his dedication to his running and is trying to persuade him to take on missionary work. He responds by saying: *I believe God made me for a purpose. God also made me fast. And when I run, I feel God's pleasure.* Eric's life took shape as he took his talent for running and used it for good. He won an Olympic medal, but his real success came years later when he was interned in a camp by the Japanese. There as an Olympic hero he was able to improve morale among the prisoners—especially the children. He organized athletic meets where, despite the people's weakening physical conditions, spirits were lifted. He showed God's love as he taught children games as well as Bible stories and hymns. He shared and invested the coin God had given him. We may not be Olympic-level runners, but each one of us has a gift, an ability, a talent—something that, when we do it, we feel God's pleasure. And when we figure out what that is... well, we are to take that and use it in ways that cause life to blossom and grow. When worship ends and the joyful chaos ceases, please don't just get up and go about your day. Sit for a few moments...think about one thing you do which energizes and makes you feel alive, one thing which you can offer to God and God's people. The possibilities are endless. It may be some sort of athletic ability. Or how about....cooking, writing, painting, singing, working with computers, relating to children—or the very elderly. It might be gardening, listening, reading. Or what about a sense of humor, a willingness to do hard, heavy labor, drive a car, decorate a room, pray. It may involve something in your vocation or in your family or here at church.

Don't just think about it...get a piece of paper and write it down. Post it somewhere, so you can see it and remember it and then do it. If we hesitate to use these gifts for fear we will fail in our endeavor, or look foolish, or not be as good as someone else, we demonstrate our lack of trust in the One who not only created us, but gifted us, asking only that we use what we have been given, that we place our hands in God's and move into the fullness of life with joy and courage. John Barlow writes: *Imagine how God can sing. How God's voice delights the universe, with a range that blends eternally into chords of great love. Imagine how God can dance, moving gracefully up to our hearts to invite us to be intimate, and live lives of joy. Then imagine how God must feel if we move back away from God to design our own destinies, shaping lives of desiring and fear. Then imagine God's happiness when a wanderer cries out to God, when the choice is made to trust in God and finally draw near.* You belong to God. God has called you by name and given you the very gifts God needs to help heal this broken world. Come. Join in the dance of joy and peace and great gladness. Thanks be to God, for God is good and God's love is forever. Amen.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Longing for Christ's reign to come among us, we pray for the outpouring of God's power on the church, the world, and all in need.

Lord of the church, ignite your people with the passion of your love. By the fire of your Holy Spirit, unify us across ministries, congregations, and denominations, and refine us to participate in your activity throughout the world. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Lord of the church, ignite your people with the passion of your love. By the fire of your Holy Spirit, unify us across ministries, congregations, and denominations, and refine us to participate in your activity throughout the world. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Lord of all in need, search out all who cry to you in distress. Scatter the heavy clouds of depression, chronic illness, unemployment, and loneliness with your radiant light. Send us as encouragement and signs of your healing. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Listen to the cries of your people waiting patiently for your healing hand and comforting Spirit especially: those who suffer with chronic pain and all cancer patients, Pr. Mary Etta, Gail, healing for Norm, Rusty, Claudia T., Edween Ham, healing for Jim, healing for Elinor, healing for Caryn, Claudia and Fran, Edie Marie, Suzee, prayers for Michael Gilleece and family, Your Neighbors clients, Theresa, and our country, that the light of Christ may shine upon them with hope. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, until that day when you gather all creation around your throne where you will reign forever and ever. **Amen.**

Thanksgiving at the Table

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us unto the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn *Christ, Be Our Light, #715, Verses 1 & 2* -Mary Senn

Vs. 1 Longing for light, we wait in darkness. Longing for truth, we turn to you. Make us your own, your holy people, light for the world to see. Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness. Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.

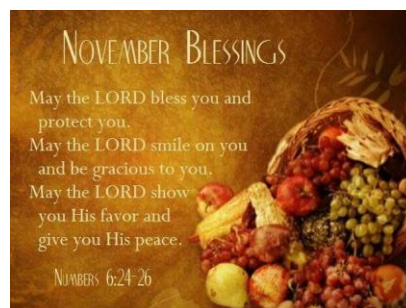
Vs. 2 Longing for peace, our world is troubled. Longing for hope, many despair. Your world alone has pow'r to save us. Make us your living voice. Shine through the darkness. Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.

Blessing

May the God of all creation, in whose image we are made, who claims us and calls us beloved, who strengthens us for service, give you reason to rejoice and be glad! The blessing of God, Sovereign, ✠ Savior, and Spirit, be with you today and always. **Amen**

Dismissal

Beloved of God, go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**





Thanksgiving Food Baskets

If you are in need of a holiday meal food basket, or would like to sponsor a family that you know who may need one, please send Sara an email with the info or call the church office at 315-732-4110 (*in case Sara is away from her desk at the time you call, please leave a message*). Baskets are by member request only. The deadline for a request is Thursday, November 19th. If you would like to make a contribution for the food baskets, you may do so by sending your gift to the church in an envelope marked “food baskets” in the memo line on your check. The deadline for contributions is November 10th. *Thank you for your continued support!*



FAIR TRADE ITEMS ARE STILL AVAILABLE AT ZION

- Maybe you have missed your favorite Organic Rooibos Tea, Mind, Body and Soul coffee, Organic Natural Cashews or Organic Total Eclipse Dark Chocolate Bars...
- Perhaps you are looking for delicious gifts to give at the holidays...
- Or you have been thinking about making a difference in the lives of small farmers in the U.S.A. and around the world by supporting Zion's Fair Trade Ministry...

To inquire about the range of products that can be ordered from Equal Exchange or to place an order, please contact Laurel McCurdy: Call or text: (315) 939-9875 Email: lemccurdy@gmail.com

Faith Formation: *Walking Together Through Advent*

Wednesdays, December 2, 9, 16, 23 from 7:00-8:15PM

The word “synod” literally means “walking together.” This course is a way for us to join siblings from all the communities of the synod in walking toward Christmas. You may want to intentionally invite a friend or family member who lives far away to join with you in this Advent faith practice as an opportunity to be together while being apart. Each week, we will watch a short film together (3-7 minutes long). The film series we will use is called “Birthing God’s Movement of Grace,” produced by The Work of the People. Then, we will have small group conversation about what we learn and notice. Finally, we will share in a time of contemplative prayer practice.

SIGN UP HERE:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd5tzTHpv3GreCtUtUJ3ESOGBYSqcoOJ6iBE3bSvNaYoEaLig/viewform>

Once registered, you will be sent the Zoom link for the retreat along with the other necessary information from the leader. There is no cost to participate. Contact Pr. Lori Kochanski lkochanski@upstatenysynod.org for info.

More about the focus of each session:

December 2 “A Cup of Longing” with Becca Stevens

December 9 “Step Back and Step In” with Emilie Townes

December 16 “The God that is Coming” with Kelly Brown Douglas

December 23 “Upsetting the Pyramid” with Diana Butler Bass

We have an abundance of *Living Lutheran* magazines from March through October. If you'd like to stop by the church to take some, give Sara a call. The magazines are on the dresser in the foyer. Some examples below.

Recipe for action

By Ron Glusenkamp

If you've tried your hand at baking during the pandemic, you aren't alone. A business report showed that sales of yeast increased 647% during March, and some stores still can't keep up with demand.

I love when a biblical story jumps out of the pages and intersects with daily life, and right now I'm thinking about that unnamed woman in the Gospel of Matthew who mixes up some yeast and flour.

Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." (Matthew 13:33)

Many commentators have written about the rarity of using yeast as a positive commodity in a biblical parable. Others have identified the heightened role (not roll) that Jesus gives to this woman baker. Father Dominic Garramone adds a twist to all of this:

"'Three measures' is the usual translation for the original Greek 'tria sata,' which is a little over a bushel of flour (1.125 bushels, to be precise)."

Then Father Dom serves up a beautiful image: "What's the message of the story? It's simple: The kingdom of heaven is like a woman who wants to do more than feed her family. The kingdom announced by Jesus is like a woman who wants to feed the village. The kingdom of God is like a woman who wants to feed the world. The kingdom is for everybody."

The kingdom is for everybody! I imagine this woman's children and grandchildren followed her example of wanting to feed everyone.

This parable foreshadows the largest church picnic, known as the "Feeding of the 5,000," in Matthew 14. In this story, Jesus "went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick" (Matthew 14:14). Sometimes in the English language we skip over the word "compassion," thinking it's something that comes

from the heart or maybe even the brain. But the original Greek word for *epi* is more along the lines of "lower intestines" or in the gut.

Jesus fed something in his gut when he looked at all the people. The unnamed baker in the previous chapter also had the same stomachache.

Recently a pastor told me how much his congregation loved to eat together in pre-COVID-19 days. Those activities are on hold, but the feeding continues. The congregation has increased monetary offerings for ELCA World Hunger (elca.org/hunger) and provides takeout meals for their community. The pastor said, "No pun intended—it eats at us that people don't have enough to eat."

And that is what verse 14 means. It ate at Jesus that these people—men, women and children—were lost and hungry.

Compassion is what led Jesus to the cross. Compassion led him to offer his life for all, bread for the world, for those hungry physically and spiritually. Compassion happened so that we might have life—new life—and have that life abundantly. Compassion begins when something "eats at us."

What's "eating" at you? The pandemic has exacerbated the hunger crisis and experts predict hunger will double before the end of 2020.

When Jesus stood among the hungry crowds, we learn that he took the gifts, blessed them, broke them and gave them away. This familiar pattern is our recipe for action. †



Ron Glusenkamp is senior director of ELCA Congregational Mission Funding.



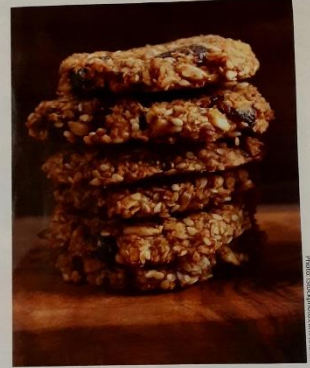
A meal to remember

I grew up at Ascension Lutheran Church in Colorado Springs, Colo. In the early 70s, the congregation sponsored refugee families, helping them resettle in the area. My family worked closely with a family from Vietnam, and, in an expression of gratitude, they invited us over to dinner one night.

I was very nervous about going because I was an extremely picky eater. (I was a great frustration to my parents!) I didn't want to offend anyone, but I wasn't sure I could force myself to eat "strange" food.

I don't remember the name of the dish this family made, but I do remember not only being able to eat it but actually liking it. This was the first time I really connected food with hospitality and began to understand why it was so important for Jesus to share meals in the Gospels.

—Susan Candea, bishop, Central States Synod



Home at the table

I didn't realize how much food has shaped my identity until my family and I immigrated to the United States. My first call took me from Germany to the far northeast corner of South Dakota, where lutefisk and lefse were readily available at the local drive-through but I wasn't able to find the ingredients I needed to prepare a traditional German Christmas dinner. After eating lutefisk and lefse alongside my parishioners, I began my quest to host a German Christmas dinner for them.

Twenty-one years later, I happily invite three or 300 people to our table for Christmas dinner. I place an order with a nearby Hutterite colony for a fattened goose. Only a certain brand of flour is deemed acceptable for my homemade spaetzle and soft, warm bread. My husband raises red cabbage in our garden. And if I am really lucky, one of my dairy farmers brings us a pint jar of real cream.

Our children have learned how to make these family dishes and love gathering around the table to celebrate community, family and how to make a home away from home.

Last year, the synod staff and I prepared a traditional German Christmas dinner for 100 people to raise funds for Lutherans Outdoors in South Dakota. Just as lutefisk and lefse may not be everyone's favorite, goose and spiced red cabbage aren't either, but one thing is certain—we'll never forget that dinner. Some call it team-building. I call it sharing my life for the sake of building community. All are welcome at the table.

—Constance Hagmaier, bishop, South Dakota Synod

Jesus and cookies

Every year, before my students preached their first sermons, my wife Cathy baked oatmeal scotchies, which I gave to them as a token of God's love and our prayers.

When we were called to the office of bishop, Cathy baked these cookies and worked with a military chaplain and our congregations to send them to his troops on a military base. Visiting that base, I learned that the only sugar soldiers in basic training are allowed are cookies from the chaplain after church. It was so fun to be the bishop of the church that sent the cookies.

One soldier explained that the only thing that got him through boot camp was Jesus and these cookies. After all, Jesus said, "Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward" (Matthew 10:42).

This is equally true for oatmeal scotchies. The reward is the faith that comes from sharing Jesus' love.

—Craig Alan Satterlee, bishop, North/West Lower Michigan Synod

Sharing faith and food

Editor's note: This August, we invited ELCA synod bishops to send us their favorite food and faith stories.

Love in a glass

My love of root beer floats goes back to my childhood. Whenever I was sick, my maternal grandfather would make us what he called "a brown cow"—several scoops of vanilla ice cream in a large mug, topped with foamy root beer. It wasn't your typical get-well meal, but it lifted my spirits and felt like love in a glass.

Since then, root beer floats have been my go-to beverage to mark a variety of occasions. In our synod office, we get out the ice cream and root beer for birthdays, for down days that need a pick-me-up or just to celebrate being a team working together.

This year, even though the synod office was closed due to COVID-19, the staff gave me a six-pack of root beer and a half gallon of vanilla ice cream for my birthday—leaving it on my porch and texting me a notice that it was there, so I could claim it before the ice cream melted. This simple treat still tastes like love in a glass.

—Tracie L. Bartholomew, bishop, New Jersey Synod

Granny's sauerbraten

We all called her "Granny." She was my father's mother, and she and my grandfather lived a city block away from St. Philip, the church we attended as a family. Often on Sunday afternoons you could find us at Granny and Poppy's for Sunday dinner.

You could find us there most holidays as well, 20 or more gathered around the dining room table and the supplemental "kids' table." Granny was the absolute head of her kitchen and did most of the work preparing a sauerbraten that would become the centerpiece of good conversation. Mealtimes were a chance to discuss politics, work, the joys of raising children and all those things that bind a family together.

It was from this family, too, that I first learned about faith. We would easily move from a meal around the Lord's table to a meal around our table—and love, God's and ours for one another, embraced it all.

—Paul Egensteiner, bishop, Metropolitan New York Synod



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