



## North/West Lower Michigan Synod

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## Prayer in a Time of Pandemic

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26-27).

My mother died 34 years ago in February of 1986. She was a woman of deep faith who prayed a lot. She had a plethora of prayer books because her style of prayer was to use already-written prayers. As I sorted through all of her prayer books after her death, I came upon a plain three-by-five card stuck between two pages with this written on it: "A prayer for when everything is bad and you don't know what to do. . . HELP!"

As we travel these days of the COVID-19 pandemic, my hunch is that most of us can identify with the one-word prayer "HELP!" So just how and where does prayer fit into our strange and unpredictable days of navigating these un-traveled waters? Each of us has our own unique ways of praying and we may pray differently depending on the circumstances in which we find ourselves. I lift up some ways that may be helpful to us in the days ahead.

For me, I find the greatest strength is beginning each day with a very intentional framing of the day as a response to the presence of God in every moment. When life is extremely stressful, it can be so difficult to remember that God will never forsake us. Continually opening my being to the presence of God gives a deep sense of peace. A short spiritual classic [The Practice of the Presence of God](#) by Brother Lawrence is a guide that I return to often. Brother Lawrence was a monk who lived in the 1600s and wrote about seeking God continuously and simply each day.

We are faced each day with a cacophony of voices. Social media, television, radio, and the words we hear from others can be filled with such negativity and cause such dissonance in us that we find ourselves exhausted and even losing hope. In order to keep a balanced perspective during this time of pandemic, it is helpful to take a break from social media and the news. It is important that we turn off the voices of the world and listen to the "still small voice" that Elijah experienced as the sound of sheer silence when he met God at Horeb (1 Kings 19:11-13 ff).

As we bless the hours and moments of each day, we can find comfort, direction, and peace as we meditate on the words of Scripture. When we become weary and simply have no words, we can also be renewed by praying the Lord's Prayer, the Creeds, the prayers found in the ELW for throughout the church year, and other prayers that we find in the many devotionals published in books and online. These written prayers can renew us and open up more avenues of meditation.

What will carry us through this time of pandemic into whatever will be our "new normal" will be our relationship with God and with one another. God continually calls us into a relationship where prayer and union with God is meant to be our way of being. We are united together through our baptism into Christ.

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The Spirit of God intercedes for us as we move into the future with this prayer: "O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

"Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35; 37-39).

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Peace,  
Rev. Rosanne M. Anderson  
Assistant to the Bishop

## Coronavirus Resources

### New Resources

- We have a resource for Mitten Synod leaders as they manage resources and ministries during the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. Topics include the CARES Act, the Paycheck Protection Program, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, and Michigan's Stay at Home Order. See: <https://bit.ly/3blkywc>
- The ELCA Churchwide Office has posted an updated FAQ and video on the Paycheck Protection Program. Find these and additional resources on their website: [elca.org/publichealth](http://elca.org/publichealth)
- Presiding Bishop Eaton shares a letter on congregational giving and the new ELCA COVID-19 Response Fund. See: <https://bit.ly/3effV8W>
- Bishop Satterlee shares a letter on Holy Communion in a Time of Crisis. See: <https://bit.ly/2yV0kcF>
- Rev. David Sprang, Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Evangelical Mission, shares a letter about adjusting to the new realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, including resources on digital worship, online giving, and stewardship, faith formation, and more. See: <https://bit.ly/2V7JB06>
- Portico shares a new video which offers perspective on the investment markets and how we navigate volatility, ways to remain emotionally grounded as retirement account balances fluctuate, and additional resources. See: <https://bit.ly/3b9UVyl>

We continue to post updates and resources pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic on our website at: <https://www.mittensynod.org/news/coronavirus-resources/>

## Holy Week Sermons & Synod Easter Vigil

If you missed any of Bishop Satterlee's daily sermons for Holy Week or our Synod Easter Vigil, you can watch the videos on our Synod YouTube Channel: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChjD1WKtNtYaTxeeP5\\_-s7bg?](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChjD1WKtNtYaTxeeP5_-s7bg?)

## Overwhelming Stress Amid COVID-19

We live with a certain level of stress every day. In fact, having at least a minimal level of stress keeps us alive. In the hectic world in which we normally live, we stress and worry about finances, family, employment, politics, relationships, and so much more. Our backpacks of feelings and stressors are nearly full on a day-to-day basis. Then something catastrophic happens and our stress gets out of control. The death of a loved one, a job loss, a divorce, severe illness, and yes, a pandemic like COVID-19, burst open our backpack and our feelings spread all over the place. Many, if not most of us, are there now. We call it "Critical Incident Stress". **The important thing to remember is that you are having normal reactions to an abnormal event.** It is not everyday that a pandemic hits. In fact, the average is once in a person's lifetime. The polio epidemic hit its peak the year I was born. The Spanish flu peaked in 1918. Pandemics can cause our stress levels to go way beyond normal levels.

This year, I celebrate 40 years of being a pastor and a firefighter. For many of those years, I have worked with a core group of people who help in times of crisis to alleviate and manage Critical Incident Stress. I have used this process in parish ministry and with our local first responders. Things I share with you here come from Critical Incident Stress Management training.

We are in a place now where **stress is over the top**. We are trying to find a new normal. We are under a "stay at home" order. Church services in person are suspended. Contact with others and pastoral care is done by phone and digitally. Our daily routines are gone. Our normal ways of dealing with stress have been corrupted. To deal with the regular day to day stress we might meet with friends and family, go out for dinner, or go to a movie. For most of us, weekly worship with face-to-face gathering and sharing in the sacraments is helpful. Having to go without those things and find new ways of relieving stress is challenging. Especially now, having to step up or create digital broadcasts and tele-pastoral care can produce more stress.

Be prepared for a second wave of stress when the travel and gathering restrictions are lifted. There will be postponed weddings, postponed funerals and graveside services, along with the new normal of dealing with things that will never go back to the way they were. The stress will grow again for rostered leaders and church families.

**Over the top stress can reveal itself** in many ways. Some of the more common ones are: difficulty sleeping, fatigue, loss or increase of appetite, emotionally edgy – laughing or crying unexplainably, poor concentration, and mind numbing. We may even have times when we blame God or feel like we are the only ones feeling this way. These are normal reactions to this abnormal event. We are humans. We have our limits. Even rostered leaders are not super human.

**So what can we do? Pray.** Keep in contact with God. Tell God everything. Pray for those you worry about. Pray for your family. Especially pray for yourself for the strength, energy, and forgiveness you need to make it through. Practice spiritual disciplines. Pray the Evening or Morning Prayer Suffrages. **Worship.** There is an abundance of quality worship and devotional resources online. Visit the Facebook pages and websites of your rostered leader friends and the synod. Let the spirituality of others inspire you. **Develop a routine.** Establish a schedule for eating, resting, working, exercise, and connecting with friends and family. **Eat healthy.** There will be the temptation to binge on sweets, try to go for fruits and vegetables, and manage fat levels. **Get outside.** We are not confined to our homes. The weather is starting to warm up. Walking, running, gardening, home repairs can all be stress relieving. **Connect with people.** Call your friends and family. Video chat. Listen to their fears and share your own. **Do something comforting.** Listen to music. Play music. Read a book. Watch a movie (DVD or online). **Share resources.** You do not have to be a digital expert. Share sermons, links, and digital resources with one another.

**What not to do?** It is not a time to over-eat, although the temptation is real. Eat healthy. It is not a time to change habits, like a binge diet. It's not a time to use alcohol excessively. On the other hand, if you have a glass of wine each day, keep that normal routine. It is not a time to go cold turkey from smoking or an occasional consumption of alcohol. Stopping abruptly will cause even more stress. Limit social media and news. Too much news and digital drama can add to stress. Don't watch other church's media broadcasts just so you can fret about how theirs are better than yours. This is a time to share resources so that we can all get through.

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**What if my stress gets worse?** For some the stress will not get better. Professional assistance may be needed. For those who are Portico Members, visit:

<https://myportico.porticobenefits.org/benefits/online-mental-health-program>.

This is the place to start for stress, depression, anxiety, and worry. Reach out to the synod staff if you need to talk. For church leaders relating to the congregation or community, know your local resources such as: Community Mental Health, Samaritas Counseling, Medical Social Workers, and others.

There is a wealth of resources on our synod webpage for dealing with the many aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic including resources for talking with children:

<https://www.mittensynod.org/news/coronavirus-resources/>

On Friday, April 17 at 11:00 am, the synod will be hosting a Stress Management Briefing on Zoom. Rostered leaders will receive a link via email. The briefing will also be recorded and put on the Synod's YouTube channel:

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChjDIWKTnYaTxeeP5\\_-s7bg?](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChjDIWKTnYaTxeeP5_-s7bg?)

One of our local Critical Incident Stress Team members, an ER Social Worker from Spectrum Health, will be the presenter, accompanied by the synod staff.

**We will make it through with the presence of God walking with us**, being connected to the community of faith, hearing God's words; "I am with you always", sharing support and resources, and practicing healthy lifestyles.

Bishop Satterlee, Pastor Rosanne Anderson, and I are here to help you. **Please reach out to us and we can make it through together.**

The Rev. David E. Sprang  
Assistant to the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission



### Synod Finances as of March 31, 2020

	Current Year		Prior Year	
	March	Year to Date	March	Year to Date
<b>Revenue</b>				
Mission Support	78,711	181,395	120,413	236,013
Other	17,517	20,765	17,675	21,922
<b>Total</b>	<b>96,228</b>	<b>202,160</b>	<b>138,088</b>	<b>257,935</b>
<b>Expenses</b>				
Churchwide Proportionate Share	39,356	90,697	60,207	118,006
Other	61,988	119,721	90,666	145,975
<b>Total</b>	<b>101,344</b>	<b>210,418</b>	<b>150,873</b>	<b>263,981</b>
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0	0	0
Net Change to Fund Balance	(5,116)	(8,258)	(12,784)	(6,047)

### Anti-Racism Training

Due to the "Stay Home, Stay Safe" mandate for the state of Michigan during this time of pandemic, the third weekend of "Doing Our Own Work: An Anti-Racism Seminar for White People" was postponed.

We are doing some sessions by Zoom this month and the May's newsletter will have the final summary of the workshop experience.

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." —Martin Luther King, Jr.

Rev. Rosanne M. Anderson  
Assistant to the Bishop

NORTH/WEST LOWER MICHIGAN SYNOD ELCA

Introducing  
**THE  
MITTEN  
SYNOD  
APP**



Available now on the  
App Store & Google Play!

LEARN MORE: [MITTENSYNOD.ORG/MITTEN-APP](https://mittensynod.org/mitten-app)

Available on iPhone, iPad, and Android devices, the Mitten Synod App keeps you connected to the Mitten Synod's latest news, events, videos, and more!

- **News:** Stay up to date with the latest news from the Synod's website, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.
- **Events:** Check upcoming events from the palm of your hand!
- **Bishop Satterlee's Videos:** Watch all of Bishop Satterlee's weekly videos and sermons!
- **Mission In the Mitten:** Read stories about ministry around the Synod!
- **Bible:** Read and reflect on the Word wherever you are!
- **Give:** Support Synod Ministries with a tap of a button!

### Upcoming Events

April 17	Informational Meeting on the 2021 ELCA Youth Gathering	Zoom	Learn More: <a href="https://bit.ly/2REUcO5">https://bit.ly/2REUcO5</a>
April 21	ELCA Internet Security Webinar	Skype	Learn More: <a href="https://bit.ly/2Vsw5mR">https://bit.ly/2Vsw5mR</a>

**Due to the current government restrictions and recommendations on in-person gatherings, many upcoming events have been cancelled or postponed. Please check with the event's organizer for more information.**

## Congregations in Transition

Note: We include congregations on the public list when the called pastor or rostered leader completes her or his ministry in the congregation. Thus, congregations in which the pastor has resigned but is still serving are not listed here. We also do not post calls that are accepted until Bishop Satterlee signs the Letter of Call.

<b>Bay Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Emily Olsen, Dean</b>	<b>Kalamazoo Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Kjersten Sullivan, Dean</b>
Faith/Saginaw	CONTRACT ACCEPTED: Rev. John Soyster (CA). Three-quarter time for two years. Begins April 2020.	<b>Stony Lake Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean</b>
Hope/Marlette (part-time)	CALL ACCEPTED: Rev. Neil Brady (NWOH). Installation TBD.	<b>Sunrise Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean</b>
		Peace/Gaylord	Supply Pastors/Interviewing
<b>Capital Area Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean</b>	<b>Traverse Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Scott Torkko, Dean</b>
Calvary/Lansing (part-time)	Supply Pastors/Preparing MSP	Messiah/Roscommon	CALL ACCEPTED: Rev. Jeff Bonn, Installation TBD.
St. Paul/East Lansing	Supply Pastors/ Congregational Vote TBD	St. Paul/Reed City	Rev. Matt Deames, Intentional Interim/Interviewing
Grace/Lansing	Rev. John Schleicher, Contract Pastor/Interviewing	Augustana/Tustin	Supply Pastors/Interviewing
Peace/Charlotte	Supply Pastors/Interviewing		
<b>Greater Grand Rapids Conference</b>	<b>Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean</b>		
Bread of Life/Hudsonville	Rev. Polly Standley, Interim/ Interviewing		
Bethlehem/Grand Rapids	Karsten Voskuil (RCA), Service of Invitation to Extended Service, TBD.		