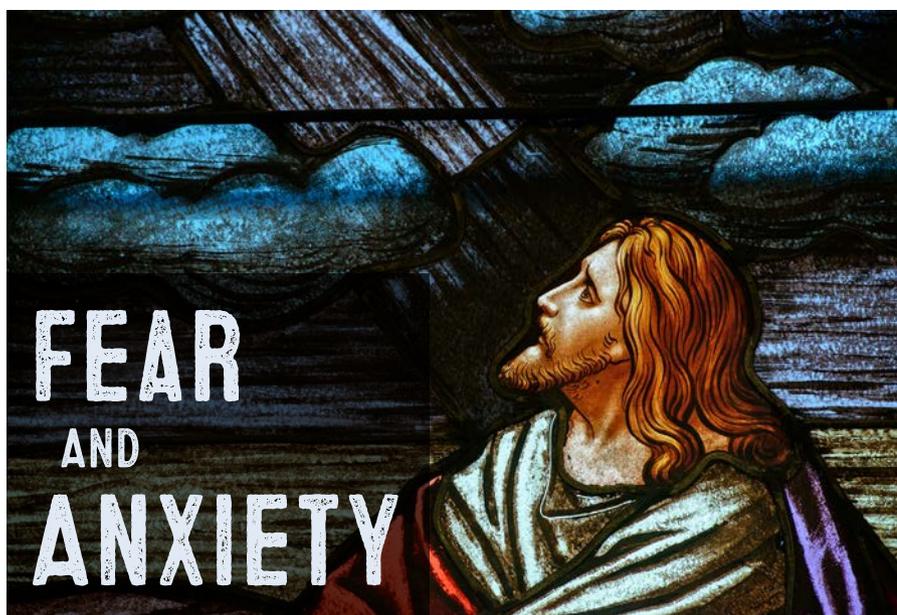


DISTRICT NEWS

NORTH DAKOTA



Rev. Arie Bertsch
District President

Grace and peace to you in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Hopefully by the time you are reading this, the fears and anxiety of the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) have plateaued, if not passed. As I am writing this in March, there is much unforeseen or unknown about how serious or how many people will be infected by this and how it will affect our lives. What is known and seen right now is that many are living in fear and anxiety about the possibility of the shortage of food and other necessities if there is a quarantine. Due to that fear, many have begun to hoard items in anxiety about what may be coming.

Many grocery store shelves are empty of hand sanitizers, toilet paper and other paper goods, meat, eggs and bread. Now some of this sudden abundance of purchasing may be due to the request of people to not go to public places, such as restaurants. Therefore, many who maybe did not prepare meals at home had to start doing so. Thus, you suddenly had a demand for food from the grocery stores rather than the restaurants. Also, due to the supposed high level of contagiousness of the virus, a lot of hand sanitizers and hand soaps were high in demand and shelves were empty. And

then, of course, the first item to be off the shelves was toilet paper. Now there should not have had to be an excessive need for more toilet paper. So, therefore, I conclude that there was hoarding going on of toilet paper. All of this reminds me of the Hebrews when they were set free from Egyptian slavery and lived in the wilderness (Exodus 16).

In the wilderness, they were being tested if they would trust God and follow Him. They complained about food and God sent them food — bread (mana) from heaven. They were to gather enough for each day and only for that day, and on the sixth day they were to gather enough for that day and the seventh day. They were not to gather more than they needed. Of course, they tried to hoard, and the leftovers bred worms and stank. They even tried to go out and gather more on the Sabbath, the day they were to rest.

In many ways, our lives could also be likened to them in the desert. We may have had enough food for a week or two of quarantine due to the pandemic, but decided that we needed to stockpile more. Now we should plan, for God does expect and bless good planning (Matt. 25:1-13). And yet, we shouldn't hoard so that others won't have what they need also. Understandably, sometimes we may hoard because others are hoarding, and we fear for our livelihood. However, God wants you to build your plans on Jesus' words:

"Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient of the day is its own trouble." — Matt. 6:25-34

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MESSAGE

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These words of promise will enable you to say, no matter what you experience in life:

"The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." — **Job 1:21**

Hopefully, you have seen how God blesses you through worries, anxieties and afflictions so that you will turn to Him for help each day. Martin Luther explains how daily dependence on God exercises and strengthens your faith:

The exercises of faith are necessary for the godly; for without them their faith would grow weak and lukewarm, yes, would eventually be extinguished. But from this source they assuredly learn what faith is; and when they have been tried, they grow in the knowledge of the Son of God and become strong and firm that they can rejoice and glory in misfortunes no less than in the days of prosperity and can regard any trial at all as nothing more than a little cloud or a fog that vanishes forthwith. — **LW, V. 5, p. 56**

Sometimes things come along and happen in our life for the benefit of others. I think of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers (Gen. 45-47). It was meant for evil by his brothers, but God meant it for good so that many would be saved. Time may tell what God meant for good from this pandemic.

Maybe at this time of your reading, the COVID-19 virus is still an ongoing concern and even a pain in the butt because of the hoarding of toilet paper. At least it is not a "thorn" in the butt! In 2 Cor. 12:7-10, St. Paul acknowledges that God gave him a "thorn" in the flesh! For Paul, this thorn was an ongoing and painful affliction that God would not remove. "I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me," Paul says. But God did not remove it from him. It was to keep Paul from becoming conceited. That is, to keep him humble.

Luther writes:

For the divine promises are not given to make us smug; but as St. Paul says

in another place: "A thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger from Satan, to harass me" (2 Cor. 12:7). Why? "Lest the magnitude of the gifts of the grace and mercy of God elate me." Therefore God sends wrestling, trials, and struggles in order that from day to day, we may understand and cling to the promises of God more clearly and certainly. ... Therefore [we] must be disciplined [by any thorn in the flesh], in order that [we] may retain faith, hope, and the expectation of the promises. — **LW, V. 5, p. 255**



Let us not be weary, fearful or anxious about this thorn of the COVID-19 virus, but rather remember St. Paul's words:

But he (God) said to me, "My grace

is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

— **2 Cor. 12:9-10**

Through all of this, I pray you have been and are continuing to be fed with God's Word to remember your Baptism as God's dear child, connected to Christ's death and resurrection. No matter what may come in this life, I pray you may endure "the thorns in the flesh," whatever they have been, and that you are still assured of the forgiveness of sins and therefore eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Your servant in Christ • **Rev. Arie Bertsch**



The lilies were still on display at St. Matthew, Hazen, on Easter.



Dear friends of Orphan Grain Train,

These are unique times in which we are living. The coronavirus has taught us about social distancing and self quarantine. We've also gone to the grocery store to see entire shelves emptied. Our favorite sports teams have had their seasons suspended or canceled. This is (hopefully) a once-in-a-lifetime event.

For most of us, these are just minor inconveniences. I haven't missed any meals, and I'm guessing none of you have either. Such is not the case for the children served by Liberian Children's Ministry. The meals packed by Mercy Meals of North Dakota and shipped by Orphan Grain Train (OGT) allow the children two meals per week at the Christian schools they attend. We presently have over 135,000 meals in our warehouse awaiting shipment. While we have more than enough clothes in our closets, some of our brothers and sisters (including people we are shipping to in Moldova) don't have enough to stay warm.

If any of us feel sick with the coronavirus or other life-threatening illnesses, we have some of the best medical technology and facilities available to us. Equipment considered obsolete by our clinics and hospitals is desperately needed in parts of Central America, and OGT works with Latin American Lutheran Missions (LALM) and other organizations to get donated equipment and supplies to where it is needed.

While the pandemic has caused us to suspend some activities temporarily, the need for humanitarian relief continues. With your support and God's continued blessing, OGT will continue to respond in love.

The warehouse is packed full, ready for shipments to Moldova and Liberia in the coming weeks. While all of our dedicated workers are unpaid volunteers, we have significant costs in international shipping, utilities and local transportation. We ask you to consider a donation prayerfully.

In Christ, Tom Boerger
North Dakota Branch Manager

MSL update

Coronavirus and COVID-19 are likely the two most often heard words during the past month. My hope is that you and your loved ones have been and will continue to be spared from this pandemic. Perhaps these times have already or will provide unique opportunities to minister to others in the name of Christ.

During this time, we hope that along with your own congregation's live-streaming and podcasts of worship services, you've included the TV and internet ministry of Main Street Living to hear God's faith-strengthening Word. Please share information about our media ministry with others. Programs are broadcast each Sunday morning and archived at mainstreetliving.com/north.

Thank you for your much-needed financial support. Checks may be sent to Main Street Living North, 821 5th Ave. S.; Fargo, ND 58103, or donate by credit card or your PayPal account on the website.

May program schedule

May 3: Rev. Chris Waldvogel (Beautiful Savior, Fargo) presents the message "Our Suffering Shepherd," based on 1 Peter 2:18-25. *This Is The Life* is "The Big Little Lie" — curiosity and a little "white lie" results in very serious unintended developments for the Fisher family.



May 10: Rev. Andrew Ratcliffe (St. Paul's, Perham) presents the message "A Life of Worship," based on 1 Peter 2:2-10. *This is the Life* is "To the End of Time" — a physicist working on nuclear weapon

development is confronted with the reality of the weapon, the utility of radiation and the blessing of Christian hope.

May 17: Rev. Matt Tooman (Immanuel, Wahpeton) presents the message "You Need the Holy Spirit," based on John 14:15-21. *This Is The Life* is "A Face from the Past" — a man

struggles to come to terms with the memory and feelings of guilt with his estranged father.

May 24: Rev. Jim Meyer (St. John's, Thief River Falls, Minn.) presents the message "Are You In?" based on John 17:1-11. *This Is The Life* is "Love is Not Enough" — a young couple struggles mightily with the decision to marry, exploring is what truly is important.

May 31: Rev. Allen Kramp (Trinity, Hope, and St. John, Hillsboro) presents the message "Rejoice in the Spirit of God's Outpouring in Jesus!" based on Acts 2:1-21. *This Is The Life* is "A Different Way" — in this Fisher family episode, Cousin Stanley visits and creates a difficult situation with a neighbor.

Ken Koehler • Volunteer Coordinator, Main Street Living North

In memoriam

"For all the saints who from their labors rest ... we feebly struggle, they in glory shine."

Marian Rutter, 95, wife of Rev. Edward Rutter, died in the Lord on March 21 with her husband of nearly 74 years at her side. The following is an excerpt from her obituary (frankfamilyfuneralhome.com/obituary/marian-rutter):

On July 25, 1954, Marion's husband was ordained into the Holy Ministry and installed as pastor of St. Paul, Wimbledon, and Zion, Courtenay, and later St. Paul, Kensal. In 1964, the family moved to Wahpeton, where they had accepted the call to

Immanuel. In 1976, they once again moved, this time to Lynch Immanuel Lutheran Church, next to Minot Air Force Base. In 1985, they moved to Lidgerwood, to serve Holy Cross. They retired in June 1991 and moved to Wahpeton for their retirement years until 2017, when they moved to Ortonville, Minn. Cards may be sent to Rev. Ed Rutter, 201 Mark Drive, Ortonville, MN 56278



Got a smartphone?

Show us what your church life looks like!



As we navigate our present normal, we are thankful that we still have opportunities, at home via the internet, to hear God's Word preached to us by our pastors. And our Lutheran school students can also be in class, albeit on a computer screen.

So, what does this look like for you? Please snap a quick photo or two ... it could be of you and/or your family seated in your living room or at a table watching the worship service on a computer or big screen TV; or your student (or a teacher) at her desk, working or looking into a screen of her classmates in rows of rectangles. Or if you are one of the few souls in church helping with the livestream, capture a scene.

Let us know who and where you are and where you worship, and we'll use them to show that while we're physically apart, we're still together as the Body of Christ.

Send your photos and, if possible, stories to Marie at news@nodaklcms.org. All other submission for *The Lutheran Witness* district insert should be sent to Marie as well.



The Schieber family of Underwood color Easter drawings while listening to an audio book. They attend St. John, Underwood.



Rev. Michael Suelzle, his wife, Beth, and their three children, Joshua (11), Eliora (9) and Sophia (7) are ready to worship in safety. Michael is pastor of St. Andrew, Niagara; Grace, Lakota; and St. Peter's, Devils Lake.



An online game of Monopoly is being played by the Schieber and Johnson families.



The livestream equipment is set up at St. Matthew, Hazen, with Rev. Kirk Peters leading service.



Josiah shows off his Easter artwork. He's a member of Bethel, Bismarck.