



THE LUTHERAN NEW YORKER

gratitude
**2020
ISSUE**

looking
FORWARD

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**METROPOLITAN NEW YORK SYNOD
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

Giving Thanks By Giving:
A Message from our Bishop | **3**

Gratitude | **4**

Looking for Jesus | **6**

Celebrating a Digital Christmas | **10**

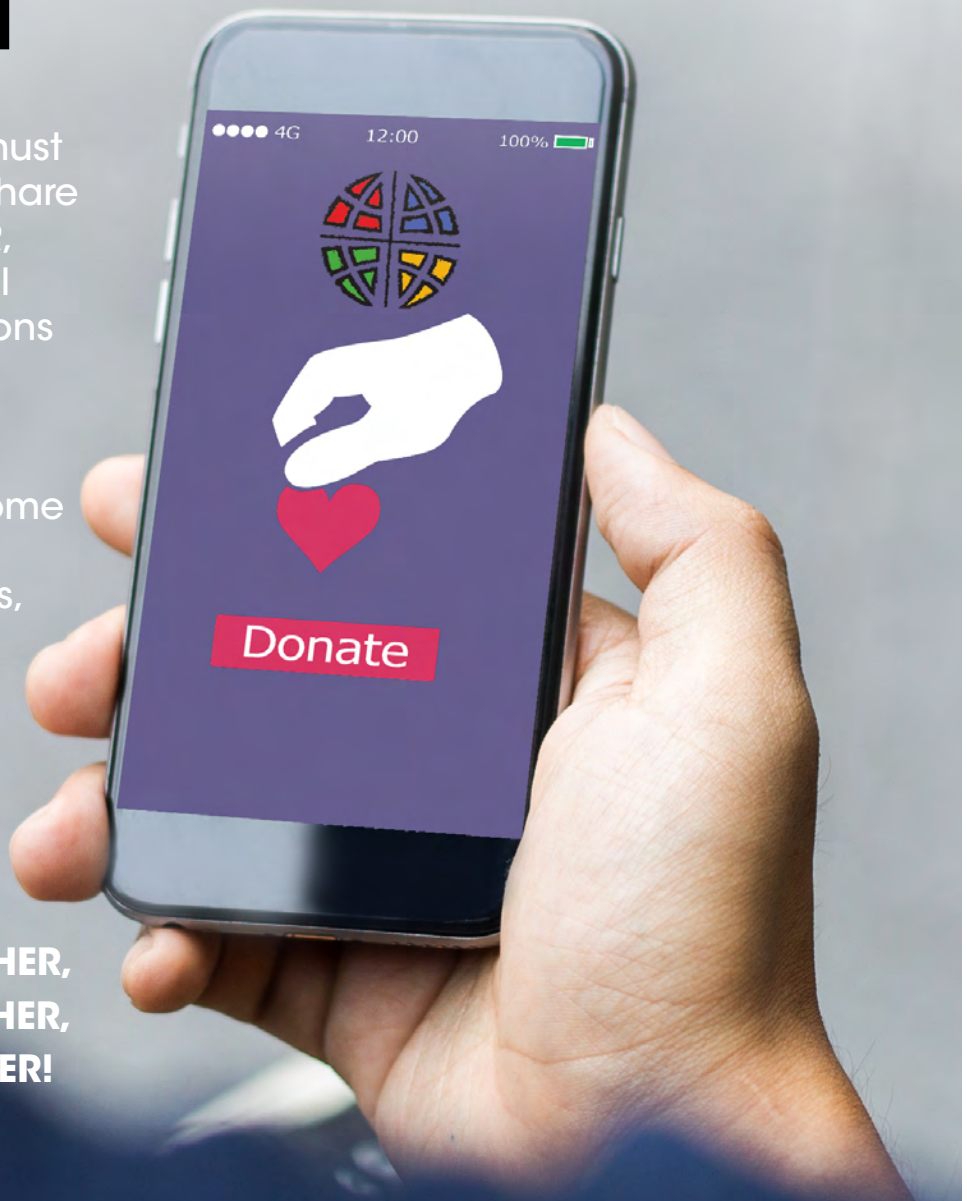
2020 MISSION SUPPORT

Now more than ever, we must support each other and share the Good News TOGETHER, as we will remain essential TOGETHER. Your contributions ensure the success of this collective effort.

Mission support dollars come back to congregations in the form of grants, services, programs, and resources, **and this support is more important than ever for ALL our congregations during this crisis.**

**WE ARE DEPLOYED TOGETHER,
WE ARE ESSENTIAL TOGETHER,
WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER!**

Your
commitment
embodies our
partnership
in the
Gospel!



[DONATE NOW BY CLICKING HERE](#)

GIVING *by* GIVING

A MESSAGE FROM MNYS BISHOP PAUL EGENSTEINER



I continue to pray for your health and safety during these unprecedented times.

The current crisis has significantly impacted Mission Support to our synod. As we strive to be good stewards of our resources, we are currently in the process of reviewing our budget for our 2020-2021 program year.

Many of our congregations have been greatly affected by the COVID-19 crisis, and as a result, **Mission Support has considerably decreased. Additionally, we are committed to helping all congregations in need navigate this crisis, through digital resources and through COVID-relief funding, including coronavirus grants for congregational emergencies.**

Therefore, in order to meet the needs of our congregations and communities, the synod has reallocated funds for continued disaster-relief aid and will need to considerably reduce expenses in certain areas that have been funded in the past.

Renée Wicklund, Vice-president of our synod; The Rev. William Baum, Co-Chair of my 2025 Vision Plan; and our MNYS Financial Management Committee, are all helping me to lead this effort. **Our priority continues to be the well-being and sustaining of our congregations and the communities they serve.**

Mission Support dollars come back to congregations in the form of **COVID-19 relief grants, services, programs, and digital resources**, and this support is important now, more than ever, as **the synod is dependent upon these dollars to continue offering this necessary aid to its congregations and communities during this crisis.**

*2020 has certainly not been the year
any of us anticipated, and
I remain thankful for all of you.*

The ways in which you help one another, and especially those in need, through acts of kindness, food contributions, volunteering, sharing of important information, donations, and the list goes on and on, is inspiring. I'm reminded daily that the light of God shines through, even in these challenging times, through all of you—God's empathetic children.

We encourage and welcome the support of our congregations and individuals who value the Gospel work we are doing and want to assist those in need in these difficult times. Please continue to prayerfully consider contributing to the future of our Synod through Mission Support, for TOGETHER we are better able to serve.

**WE ARE DEPLOYED TOGETHER.
WE ARE ESSENTIAL TOGETHER.
WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER!**

I thank God for your support and for being in ministry with you.

**In Christ,
✠ Bishop Egensteiner**

GIVE THANKS BY GIVING

Consider making a donation for our Mission by clicking [HERE](#) or sending your gift to MNYS Mission Support, 475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1620 | New York, NY 10115.

You can also open the camera on your phone and scan the code below to donate.



GRATITUDE

MNYS VICE-PRESIDENT RENÉE WICKLUND



Back in April, I made a video lamenting the fact that our church buildings would be closed for Good Friday, the Easter Vigil, and Resurrection Sunday. I was so sad about missing in-person worship those holy days.

Of course, I had no idea, in April, that seven months later we would still be

living under pandemic precautions.

Even though it's a secular holiday, Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday. What's not to like about giving thanks by breaking bread with family and friends? After the year we've had, I was extra looking forward to this Thanksgiving. But my mother and stepfather had to cancel their plans to come from Texas, because travel was too risky. My brother in California also canceled his plans to come. As for my family upstate, my father, who is 79 years old, currently has COVID-19. It goes without saying we couldn't visit with him. So, instead of the annual celebration we usually host at our home, I cooked a fancier dinner for just the members of our household, those who eat here every day.

On the home front, "distance learning" has been an absolute disaster for my son. Distance learning works for some kids. For others, especially those with special needs, it just doesn't. So, I've surrendered my own time to become my son's educational support system, in the hopes he won't lose an entire school year.

At the beginning of October, I again started Sunday visits to our Metro New York congregations. That was wonderful! Then came this most recent surge in COVID cases, when

driving around to mingle with different communities became irresponsible. I'm back to worshipping online.

And now I've come down with conjunctivitis in my right eye. My eye has been infected for two weeks. Normally, I would be a little panicky, rearranging my plans to avoid social gatherings or close contact—but hey, it's not like I was going anywhere, anyway.

That's my story, and I can't imagine it's going much better for any of you. In fact, many Lutheran New Yorkers are out of work, insecure in food or rent, lamenting that they cannot stay home to supervise distance learning like I'm doing, or even mourning the loss of loved ones. Plus, whatever your political affiliations or positions, you're probably looking around our country right now and wondering, *How did we get into this mess?*

Two weeks ago, we lost a member of my former congregation. Unexpectedly early, he left us for the heavenly kingdom. He was a fine young man, whom I'd watched grow up, from confirmation to adulthood. Then he was gone. And I thought, *That's it. I'm done with this pandemic. I can't go on with this.*

Does that sound familiar? It does to me. That must have been the hundredth time I had the thought. I think the first time was in April, when our church buildings needed to be closed for Easter. Things got worse again—we're in the third surge of this pandemic—and again I think, *That's it. I can't go on with this.*

Of course, it's not true. I can go on. I can, and so can you. In the 24th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus assures us that **"the one who endures to the end will be saved."** This is echoed in the first chapter of the Epistle of James, which says: **"Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."**

I do wish James had seen fit to provide somewhat more guidance on exactly how we endure. **I guess there are no promises that it will be easy, only the assurance that, by faith, we will endure.**

*The how is up to us.
For me, this week
the how of
endurance is—gratitude.*

I am grateful that I'm here, alive and experiencing a day that the Lord has made.

I am grateful that my family had a Thanksgiving dinner. **I am grateful** we had the resources to provide Thanksgiving dinner to a few nearby families in need.

I am grateful for the hope that my father's condition is improving. **I am grateful** that my mother, stepfather, and brother decided to take precautions to protect their own health.

I am grateful for my son, and that I have time to give him. **I am grateful** that this week he requested to FaceTime with his pastor, and had a computer and the Internet with which to do so.

And I am grateful to all of you. Very, very often these days, I am so thankful to be a Lutheran New Yorker, to be part of this community of Christians. Last Tuesday, the synod council met via Zoom—I abhor operating by Zoom, and yet, now I'm grateful for the resource—and I had a few tears in my eyes, from the joy of seeing those faithful stalwarts, reporting for duty, in times of trouble carrying on God's work. (No one could tell I was crying, because my eyes looked red and swollen from the conjunctivitis. At that moment, maybe I was even grateful for conjunctivitis.)

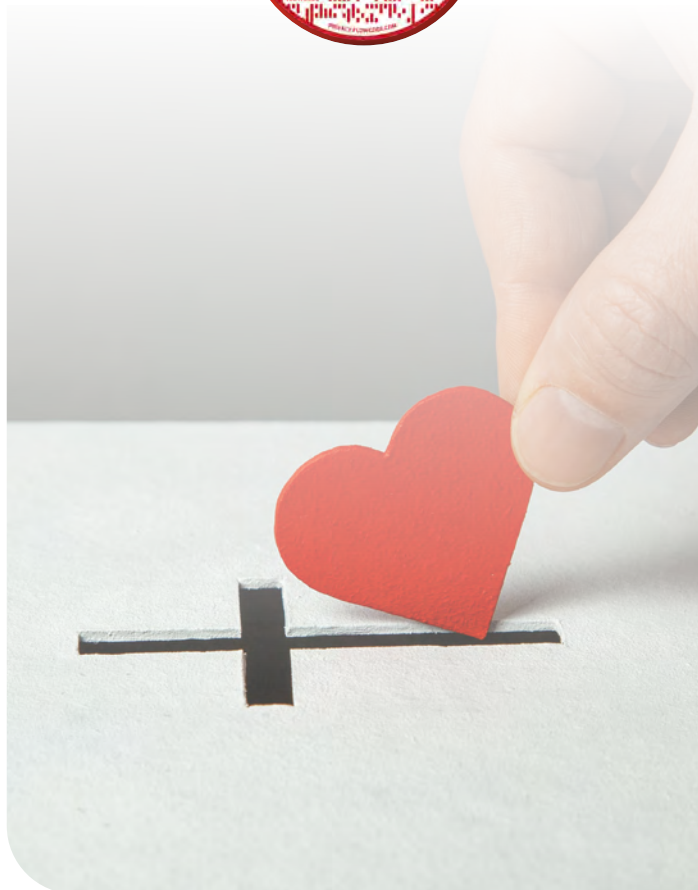
My prayer is that we can be grateful for each other, and for the One who came to overcome the greatest challenge of all. Because somehow, some way, together, we've got this. #LutheranNewYork.

GIFT OF GRATITUDE

Help us to continue being Church TOGETHER and Lutheran New Yorkers TOGETHER during this especially difficult time, by saying thank you with a **GIFT OF GRATITUDE**

Donations to our Mission can be made by clicking **HERE** or sending your gift to MNYS Mission Support, 475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1620 | New York, NY 10115

To donate, you can also open the camera on your phone and scan the code below. Thank you.



The background of the top section features a pattern of stylized hands in various shades of blue, teal, and grey, interspersed with pink hearts. The title 'LOOKING for JESUS' is prominently displayed in the center.

LOOKING *for* JESUS

THE REV. KEVIN VANDIVER, ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. (Matthew 25: 35,36)

This Advent, as we wait for Jesus, let us not look for him in fancy gifts, opulent manger displays or extravagant holiday celebrations; let us instead look for him in the poor immigrant minor, the queer homeless youth, and the **countless other individuals in need of life's simplest comforts: food, shelter, warmth, and care.** Jesus was born in a manger in humble swaddling clothes; let us assume the role of the shepherds this holy time of year and ask ourselves, **what gifts would we bring Him? It is in these acts of generosity, love and grace that we find Jesus.**

The Advocacy Taskforce commits itself year-round to caring for the stranger, advocating for our queer siblings, fighting racism, respecting our environment, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and aiding the poor. **Let us work TOGETHER to aid those most in need, as Jesus would.**

HERE ARE TIPS FROM YOUR ADVOCACY TASKFORCE CHAIRS ON HOW YOU CAN HELP THIS HOLIDAY SEASON:

Christopher Vergara
Advocacy Taskforce Chair

Substance abuse and the opioid crisis has been on the rise during this pandemic. The holidays provide an excellent opportunity to talk to your young adults—about the devastating effects of opioid and prescription drug misuse. Believe it or not, your adult children will listen, if they feel you are approaching them from a place of love, support, and, most of all, an open line of communication. The statistics are staggering. In the United States, an average of 91 people die every day from an opioid overdose. Nearly 2 million people have a pain reliever use disorder, according to 2016 data. Let your children know a large percentage of heroin use follows

misuse of prescription drugs. Tell them you are aware that heroin use is rising among people between the ages of 18 and 25 years. Our national data tell us that the sharing of prescription medications among friends and family accounts for 54 percent of non-medical opioid use, so having a conversation about this issue couldn't be more appropriate or important.

There is good news to share. Prevention works. Opioid deaths are preventable. And you have a powerful and important role in preserving your family's health and well-being. This holiday season, let your young adults know you want them to have a long, happy, and successful life, and that using heroin or misusing prescription opioids could permanently derail their dreams and plans for the future.

Family conversations about the consequences and dangers of misusing prescription opioids or using heroin will help our young adults make healthy choices for years to come.

Gerard Falco
Environmental Stewardship Committee

There are endless ways to sustainably celebrate a traditional Christmas holiday. **Think ethically purchased gifts, repurposed boxes, wrapping from recycled paper, and LED lighting,** for example. These individual efforts feed the spirit. They reinforce the feeling that we are doing the right thing. However, this year is unarguably very different. The COVID-19 crisis serves as a vivid reminder that we depend on each other for our collective well-being, and for that of all creation. As Paul's message to the Romans proclaims (12:5): *"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another."*

This year, we challenge you to go beyond being a good citizen of the planet and to openly bear witness to the climate crisis.

Beyond climate marches and such, consider urging your congregation to join fellow congregations and our synod's Environmental Stewardship Committee in developing activities to further the goals of the [Earth Charter](#) in the year 2021.

**The Rev. Eduardo F. Arias
AMMPARO/Sanctuary Ministry**

Our ministry to the immigration service, AMMPARO Sanctuary of the Metropolitan New York Synod, is focused on the many unaccompanied minors who arrive in the United States. Immigration to a new country can be intimidating and frightening, especially for unaccompanied minors crossing the border, looking for a better future, with no family or support network to help them. **As we manage the struggles of this pandemic, especially during the holiday season, let us remember how additionally difficult it must be for migrant minors.**

We work, with great love, to **promote the well-being and safety of children through a series of comprehensive support services to accompany them.** It is of the utmost importance that during this pandemic they feel **accompanied** and **cared for** by us, and that, without breaking safety protocols, they can feel our profound gestures of **loving solidarity**. First, you can **send a letter with a message of welcome and hope to the office of the bishop, which we will deliver on your behalf.** You can **send monetary donations to the Sanctuary/AMMPARO fund that aids us as we accompany migrant minors with a variety of basic needs that include school supplies, clothes, winter wear and books.** We deposit funds into the migrant minor's accounts at the detention center so they can make phone calls home to their families. During the pandemic, we have also been working to provide the children with the **technology** they need to keep up with their **schoolwork**, as they continue their studies digitally. Lastly, we encourage everyone to **write to Gov. Cuomo** to sign into law the Separation of Children Accountability Reporting (SCAR) Act, which requires greater transparency from NY State foster care organizations that hold separated and unaccompanied children and receive federal funding from the Office of Refugee Resettlement/HHS for this work.

Let us together care for vulnerable children among us as we continue to build the kingdom of God here on earth. A kingdom of love, peace, justice, and above all, dignity.

**The Rev. Kelsey Brown
LGBTQIA+ Cohort**

The holidays are frequently depicted as happy times, with tables full of families laughing and loving, but with the current state of the world full of isolation and lack of community, it's especially hard to feel hope, joy, love and peace in this season.

Isolation and loneliness can be common for folks in the LGBTQIA+ community, many of whom have experienced these feelings from their families long before the coronavirus came to town. In this season, as advocates and allies, I have a list of a few things you can do to support those in need of extra care this holiday season.

Friends, if nothing else, please **show kindness** in any way you can. Maybe that means squinted eyes from smiling behind your mask, holding open a door as you exit with an "after you," or even offering a hand to those who might need your help (from a safe distance).

You can **donate to organizations and funds that promote the broad welcome all people found in Christ Jesus.** Organizations like *Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries*—their endowment fund and various other resources help publicly identified LGBTQIA+ rostered leaders in the Church with micro grants and support to sustain their livelihoods and ministries during these unprecedented times.

Looking for more on the **ground participation**? You can follow the amazing @qween_Jean on Instagram. Her advocacy and deep care for the Trans community have been unwavering, and she takes up space, calls for change, and does it all in love, every week on Thursday evenings. Find out more on Instagram.

We can all get through this—but we've got to do it together. Let's take that first step—together.

**Dr. Robert Brent & S. Dcn. Karen Nurmi
Hunger Committee**

The economic impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic has caused a significant increase, both domestically and internationally, in the number of people who are food insecure. Food insecurity means that a person does not have access to adequate, affordable, nutritious food at least once a month without resorting to emergency food programs. Hunger experts predict the number of people facing food insecurity could double before the pandemic is over.

While support of food pantries and emergency meals is essential in providing immediate hunger relief, advocacy is needed to ensure that policies and practices are in place to help people facing food insecurity. Both **ELCA Advocacy** and **Bread for the World**—an ecumenical hunger advocacy organization with strong Lutheran roots founded in NYC—are encouraging people to contact their leaders in Congress to urge them to pass a strong COVID-Relief bill. Both **ELCA Advocacy** and **Bread for the World** support a 15% increase in SNAP (food stamps) benefits, and well as significant international assistance. **You can easily email your Senators and Representative through Bread for the World's website (www.bread.org).** Click on the banner **Hunger at Historic Levels**.

Take Action Now. Raise your voice and help make a difference for those challenged by hunger!

In our holiday season, we can work to create new traditions, taking special care of our indigenous siblings. We can say goodbye to harmful Thanksgiving myths that erase the devastation of colonization on Native peoples. Learn about the true history of indigenous people and their contributions. In our celebrating, we can acknowledge the traditional indigenous land our homes and our church buildings are on. We can learn to be good allies to Native peoples by learning about and supporting native issues and organizations like the [American Indian and Alaska Native Lutheran Association](#).

May we continue to dismantle racism in our churches, homes, and hearts, this holiday season, as we celebrate the birth of the One who broke down every wall and claims us all as God's children.

The Rev. Marcia Parkinson & The Rev. Becca Seely Anti-Racism Committee

We are resolved to continue our commitment to address racism in our church and society, and provide anti-racism training to our leaders, clergy, and candidates. Pr. Michael Russell, an ELCA pastor and trainer with *Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training* commented, "As a confessional and reformational church, the Metropolitan New York Synod has engaged a substantial amount of time, financial and human resources in dismantling systematic racism and how it hinders our ability to be the church and live out the gospel of Jesus Christ." Here are several ways you can engage in the reforming work of anti-racism during this holiday season.

Last year, we kicked off an anti-racism initiative: *The Every Congregation Challenge*. **We are challenging every congregation in the Synod to engage in at least one intentional time of learning and conversation about racism.** To help facilitate this, we have put together resources and discussion guides for you to use in your context. We have a variety of topics to choose from, and within each topic, there are different ways to engage—from reading an article or watching a short video, to a movie night, to a book study. These are great for use in an adult education hour or a special event. You can even pick your own resource to discuss. **The goal is to get the conversation started—or to help it go deeper—and to use these occasions of learning and growing together as a starting point for taking action to challenge racist practices and systems in our churches and communities.** Let us know how we can support you in your conversations.

Help us to continue these important Advocacy Efforts during this especially difficult time, with a donation for our Mission by clicking [HERE](#) or sending your gift to MNYS Mission Support, 475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1620 | New York, NY 10115

You can also open the camera on your phone and scan the code below to donate. Thank you.





DIGITAL CHRISTMAS RESOURCES & IDEAS!

The Office of the Bishop has put together recommendations and resources to help you plan alternative end-of-year festivities, especially Christmas.

**2020 CHRISTMAS RESOURCES
AND IDEAS [HERE](#)**

Or, open the camera on your phone and scan the code below to donate. Or, open the camera on your phone and scan the code below.

These are ideas that can be tailored to your congregation's or community's needs, or perhaps they can just be a jumping-off point.

Though many of us may be physically apart,
spiritually we remain **TOGETHER!**



CELEBRATING A DIGITAL CHRISTMAS

ROBERTO LARA,
ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP FOR
COMMUNICATIONS AND
DEVELOPMENT



The holidays are a holy time of year; it is also a time of reflection and a time traditionally spent with family, friends, and fellow congregants. But this holiday season will probably look different than those we are used to. In order to protect those we care for, we may not be able to be physically together this year, but by implementing **safe practices** and **looking out for one another**, we can truly embody the sentiment of being Church Together.

If we have learned something uplifting during this crisis, it is that Church is so much more than a building—Church transcends the brick and mortar sanctuaries we are so accustomed to visiting. Even when **our buildings were closed, our Church remained open, and our churches have been diligently serving our communities**. At the height of the pandemic, communicating posed a challenge in the absence of physically thriving churches where members gather in-person to pray and learn together. **Digital communication channels quickly became our primary tool to stay relevant and connected with our members**, and thanks to these digital channels, we learned that regardless of the method we use to share the Good News, **our mission of sharing the Word of God has to be the main focus**. Many congregations even obtained a substantial number of **new members** due to the embracement of the digital realm. **Let us learn from this experience with Digital Church as we enter the holidays.**

How, then, might we safely honor the birth of our Lord and Savior, celebrate Advent and Christmas, and harken the warmth and faithfulness of our communities?

The Office of the Bishop has prepared **DIGITAL CHRISTMAS RESOURCES & IDEAS** to help our members, congregations and communities plan alternative, digital end-of-year festivities. These ideas can be tailored to your needs and specific situations, or perhaps could be a jumping-off point; either way, they will help all of us **take care of one another while enjoying faithful holiday celebrations safely**.

DIGITAL CHRISTMAS RESOURCES & IDEAS:

VIRTUAL WORSHIP SERVICES

Digital worship services are an excellent way to gather and pray with your community at this holy time of year.



Please keep in mind that if you are planning on live-streaming services, don't forget about your online audience, and try not to only live-stream. Instead, also **create services for your online audience via Zoom or another platform that invites their participation and engagement in worship**. Digital attendance has increased during this pandemic, and you do not want to miss an opportunity to sustain and retain this new audience.

Helpful resources:

[How To: Digital Services via ZOOM](#)

[How To Livestream Your Worship Service](#)

[Video and Audio Recommendations for Live-streaming or Recording](#)

[Faith Formation Online](#)

[Digital Worship & Holy Communion \(ELCA\)](#)

MNYS SERVICE OF THE WORD: SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Pastors, would you enjoy a weekend off? Congregations and communities, would you like to join Bishop Egensteiner and the synod staff for Christmas?



On **Sunday, December 27 (Christmas I)** at **10 am**, the Office of the Bishop will be premiering a Service of the Word on [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#).

The virtual front doors of MNYS are open to all. Let us digitally gather together for this synodical celebration.

DIGITAL OFFICE HOURS

The holidays can be a time of difficulty for many, and the crisis we are all experiencing may be increasing levels of stress, sadness, loneliness and anxiety. **Providing a schedule of digital office hours can be a very helpful source for much-needed pastoral care this holiday season.**



ECUMENICAL DIGITAL COFFEE HOURS

Host a digital coffee hour via Zoom and invite ecumenical partners and guests, leading up to holidays and/or after virtual worship services. You can remain in faithful and thought-provoking discussion with your fellow siblings and maintain our sense of community and collaboration in the name of the Holy Spirit.



Helpful resources:

[How To: Coffee Hour by Zoom](#)

VIDEO HOLIDAY GREETINGS

Design a video holiday greeting that invites everyone to participate. Not only is this a fun activity to share with one another, but it will help ordained leaders, lay leaders, and faithful congregants and communities get into the holiday spirit.



DIGITAL POSADAS

Explore the Mexican Christmas tradition of Posadas this season, and digitalize it! This unusual holiday season, devoid of most travel and in-person gatherings, offers us the rare opportunity to explore new cultural traditions from the comfort of our homes. The Posada celebrations can be shared with family, friends, and fellow congregants via scheduled Zoom meeting gatherings. Learn more about Posadas, [HERE](#).



CROSS-CULTURAL ZOOM ACTIVITIES

Coordinate activities via Zoom with fellow congregations that have different traditions than your own. The digital interface we now rely on offers everyone the ability to more easily plan events and the opportunity to dismantle barriers. **Discover new cultural traditions and new ways of celebrating this holiday season!**



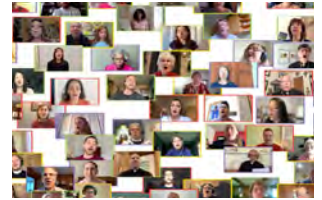
ADVOCACY EVENTS

Organize advocacy events with local Lutheran organizations (i.e., toy drives, food pantry collection, etc.), for members of your community to get involved in during this time of giving. There are so many in need right now, and the Church can continue to be there for everyone. Additionally, young new members can also engage in such advocacy efforts, giving them a place and purpose in which to exercise generosity.



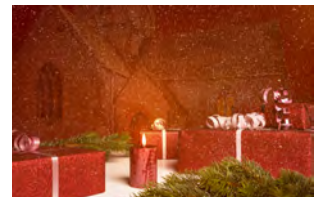
VIRTUAL HYMN SINGS

Worship the Lord and bond through hymnal music with your congregational community, via a virtual hymn sing. This can be hosted live through a Zoom virtual choir, or be prerecorded and edited into a video to share with the entire congregation and community.



HOLIDAY KIT

Create a holiday kit with crafts, candles and worship elements for the holiday season, and offer them to households in your congregation.



IMPORTANT COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

Please note that your services or events may contain music that is copyright protected. In order to avoid any potential issues, consider subscribing to CCLI Church Copyright License. For more information on this topic and about CCLI, click [HERE](#).

To share the DIGITAL CHRISTMAS RESOURCES & IDEAS, click [HERE](#)

or open the camera on your phone and scan the code below.





MERRY SOCIALLY-DISTANCED CHRISTMAS
from
THE OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

THE LUTHERan
NEW YORKER



Metropolitan New York Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
 God's work. Our hands.