

Lutheran Studies Conference 2021
Living with Mortality: Illness, Trauma, Joy and Hope

2021 11th Annual Lutheran Studies Conference: Living with Mortality: Illness, Trauma, Joy and Hope

This year's Lutheran Studies Conference will focus on finding love and hope in the wake of the pandemic and will address the various forms of trauma and loss we continue to face. Mortality, anxiety, illness and grief are near and we struggle to piece life together in a new way. A metaphor for this can be found in the ancient Japanese pottery art, Kintsugi. This art form puts broken pottery back together with gold, a symbol of embracing flaws and imperfections and living with brokenness. Beauty is possible even when things fall apart. We will look at how we carry both joy and brokenness as individuals and also what it means for our vocations of caregiving for one another and our community.

As always, registration is free. All events will be available virtually. The keynote lecture will be open to the campus community for in-person, social distanced, limited attendance (subject to change).

This year's Lutheran Studies Conference offers three opportunities:

- 1. An Interactive Online Conference (See sessions descriptions below)**
- 2. An adult forum for congregations and individuals on the book by Dr. Deanna Thompson's book *Glimpsing Resurrection: Cancer, Trauma and Ministry***
- 3. A Keynote Webinar with Dr. Deanna Thompson**

It will include:

- 1. Interactive Online Conference sessions:** The morning sessions will be held virtually and include:

12-12:15 Guided Meditation: Rev. Jen Rude, PLU Campus Pastor on embodiment, grief, hope, and centering ourselves in the moment and conversation;

12:15-12:30 Opening Remarks: Broken Living in a Pandemic World, Dr. Marit Trelstad

These comments begin the conversation by acknowledging pandemics of Covid, racism and environment that have impacted our collective, familial and personal lives. We are faced with mortality, grief, trauma and loss individually and collectively. This short talk invites us to consider sources of resilience, hope or joy that accompany us and help us survive.

12:35-1:45: At the Beside of Covid: An Interfaith/Intercultural Panel – This panel offers us the opportunity to hear from religious and medical leaders who have been with the dying and grieving in a uniquely close way. They will share the struggles they witnessed and experienced in lieu of the pandemic as well as reflect on insights or lessons learned from their roles in relation to Covid patients in this

uniquely difficult time. These bedside practitioners will lead us in examining the vocation of caregiving during these times and may speak to the role of faith or spirituality for the dying and their families. Speakers include representative leaders from Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and the Lummi Tribe.

Panelists:

- **Imam Jamal Rahman**, Co-founder and Muslim Sufi minister at Interfaith Community Sanctuary and adjunct faculty at Seattle University
- **Dr. Dakotah C. Lane, MD**, Peace Health, Lummi Indian Health Center
- **Rabbi Bruce Kadden**, PLU Religion Faculty & Retired Rabbi Temple Beth El, Tacoma
- **Rev. Mara Forster Smith**, Christian Chaplain, Swedish Medical Center
- **Rev. Tadao Koyama**, Tacoma Buddhist Temple

2-3pm Embracing Mortality: Resources and Conversations on Approaching Death and Grief with Intentionality:

This session gives a brief introduction to each of the following topics by experts followed by the opportunity to choose one or two 15-20 minute focus groups and discussions on the following topics:

- Burial, Cremation, Faith and Ecology: Dr. Marit Trelstad, PLU Chair of Lutheran Studies, PLU Professor of Religion
 - A Safe Lodging a Holy Rest: The role of rituals in preparing for and marking death: Dr. Samuel Torvend, PLU Professor of Religion
 - African American Grief: Rev. Dr. Beverly Wallace, Luther Seminary St. Paul, MN
 - End of Life - We Can Do Better: Research and Approach to End of Life; Dr. Mark Mulder, Dean of the School of Business, PLU Professor of Marketing
 - Mental Health and Support : Satya Jaech, MA, LMHC, SoulWork Tacoma
2. **7-8:30 pm A Hybrid Zoom webinar with [Dr. Deanna Thompson](#)**, Author of *Hoping for More: Having Cancer, Talking Faith and Accepting Grace* (2012) and *Glimpsing Resurrection: Cancer, Trauma and Ministry* (2018)
- **Attendance during Covid:** This lecture will welcome all on-campus PLU community members while maintaining PLU's policies on distancing and lower room capacity. A limited number of community and congregation members may come in person. Please send an email to Kendall Jeske (jeskekj@plu.edu) if you would like to attend the lecture in person.

Dr. Thompson is a Lutheran theologian whose work has been impactful on many who search for meaning and faith in light of trauma, grief and diagnoses of terminal illness or incurable disease.

CONFERENCE WEBINAR: "Beyond Deep Gladness: Coming to Terms with Vocations We Don't Choose."

The talk urges an expansion of Beuchner's definition of vocation and uses trauma theory to talk about the issues we've been facing (pandemic, systemic racism). Thompson will talk briefly of her own experience with illness and will talk about the importance of communal and public lament and then conclude with a reconceptualization of hope for this time. She will encourage us to reflect on the "suffering that remains" (Shelly Rambo's definition of trauma) in their lives post-pandemic and how we might need to ritualize lament, grief, and the opportunities to move forward.

Her work as a Lutheran, feminist theologian on this topic engages interfaith approaches to this topic and draws insights from Lutheran understandings of meeting the sacred in sorrow and brokenness. She also considers the work of Dr. Anant Rambachan's writings on vocation as he draws from the Hindu concept of non-attachment in thinking about how to deal with the sadnesses that accompany us.

- 3. Adult forum book discussions for congregations and individuals: Sunday, October 3 at 9:00am, prior to the conference.** Forums will focus on Dr. Deanna Thompson's book *Glimpsing Resurrection*. Dr. Thompson is also the keynote speaker for the conference. Please encourage your congregation to read ahead!

From the book description of *Glimpsing Resurrection*: "In *Glimpsing Resurrection*, Deanna A. Thompson combines recent trauma research with compelling first-person narrative to provide insight into the traumatic dimensions of living with a serious illness. Her aim is to help those who are ill and those who care for and minister to them deepen their understanding of how best to offer support.

The tendency for Christians to move almost immediately from death to proclamations of new life risks alienating those for whom healing and new life seem out of reach," says Thompson. *Glimpsing Resurrection* focuses less on the "why" to help readers instead come to terms with the "how" of living with a serious disease. In particular, Thompson provides a framework and concrete suggestions for how to be a church where those who are undone by illness can be undone, as well as a place that can love and support them to hope.

Finding space within the psalms, the story of Job, Jesus' cry of God-forsakenness on the cross, and even Christ's descent into hell helps us imagine how Christian communities can be spacious enough to acknowledge and hold those who are undone by illness," Thompson says. "Only then does it become possible to identify the hope that can emerge from our not-yet-resurrection reality to imagine more in life today as well as in the life to come."

We invite you to read Dr. Thompson's book [Glimpsing Resurrection: Cancer, Trauma and Ministry](#) with us in preparation for the conference events and join us for a virtual adult forum on October 3 at 9am.

Questions?

Contact University Chair of Lutheran Studies, Dr. Marit Trelstad at marit.trelstad@plu.edu or Director of Congregational Engagement, Kendall Jeske at jeskekj@plu.edu.

The conference is free and open to the public and is made possible by the generosity of the anonymous donors who endowed the University Chair in Lutheran Studies.