



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Dear friends and partners in ministry,

November 2024

Most of you reading this newsletter have the Thanksgiving holiday on your minds at this time of year, and you are thinking about all the things you can be thankful for. Where I am, in Guyana, November 28 is a regular workday, not a holiday. But, of course, even a regular workday can be a day of thanksgiving, and in these weeks, I am giving thanks for a recent visit that I made to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname (ELKS).

Suriname is a Dutch-speaking country just east of Guyana. The Lutheran church there was established in 1741, and on November 15 of this year it celebrated its 283rd birthday. The anniversary prompted the leadership of the church to set aside some time for the community to reflect on its Lutheran identity. They invited me to help them do that at a retreat for the pastors and lay leaders of the



congregations. In the photo above, you see Rev. Rafael van Ommeren asking participants to share from their own experience what being Lutheran means for them. If you are Lutheran, what would you say?

The responses of those at the retreat varied. Some people spoke about how being Lutheran was part of their family's identity for generations; others spoke about how meaningful the Lutheran liturgy



A small group discusses how to engage people who visit the church online.

was for them. In fact, one of the sessions that I was asked to facilitate was about Lutheran worship. We reviewed the two key parts of worship: reading, reflecting on, and responding to the Word of God in the scriptures; and receiving the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. We explored how to help people who are new to the church, like children and visitors, to experience those central things. We also had lively discussion about secondary traditions and local

practices that vary from place to place. Our guide was the Augsburg Confession, Article VII, on the Church: “It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel. For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere. As Paul says in Ephesians 4:4-5: ‘There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism’.”

On the Sunday after the retreat, I had the pleasure of worshiping and preaching at the Martin Luther Church in downtown Paramaribo, the capital city of Suriname. It is the oldest of the Lutheran congregations there. In 1743, the first person baptized in that church building was a baby boy named Hendrikus Martinus Middlehoff. His family donated a silver bowl to be used for the baptism, and it is still used. On it, a prayer is etched. It says, in part, “Let me, O God, always remember the power of my baptism.” What power is that? In his Large Catechism, Martin Luther says it is “victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God’s grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts.” We share that power with all Christians, whenever they lived and wherever they live, and that is a cause for thanksgiving!



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P.S. In addition to prayer, here are ways to support me financially.

1. To become a covenant congregation, download the form at ELCA.org/covenantform or call 800-638-3522, ext. 2820.
2. Make an individual gift by check payable to “ELCA Missionaries” with “Carolyn Schneider (GCS2016)” in the memo line and mail your check to:
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