



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

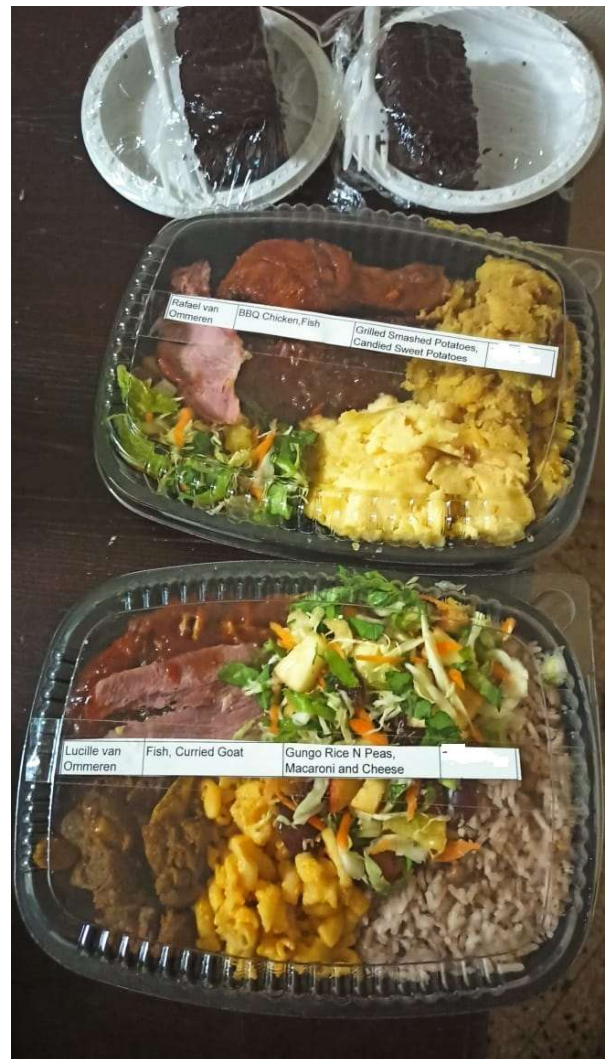
God's work. Our hands.

Christmas greetings, friends!

As I write to you from the United Theological College of the West Indies (UTCWI) in Kingston, Jamaica, I am experiencing the season of Advent in the Caribbean context for the first time. I can report to you that it is much like the preparation for Christmas in the United States. Beginning in mid-November the stores have been decorated with artificial Christmas trees, tinsel, and ornaments, with jazzed-up Christmas carols piping over the sound system. Churches put up Advent wreaths and have had candle-lighting ceremonies with reflections on the theme of each week of Advent. At UTCWI we are in the middle of the examination period, but we stopped to have fun last night at a virtual Christmas dinner party. Food traditionally eaten at Christmas time in Jamaica was catered and delivered to each residence. Since I am vegetarian, I skipped the ham and barbecued chicken, but the rest of my meal was traditionally Jamaican: gungo rice and peas, candied sweet potatoes, macaroni and cheese, a chocolate-molasses cake called “fruit cake”, and a drink made from a flower called “sorrel” in Jamaica and called “Jamaica” in Mexico, spiced with ginger and cloves. It was delicious.

We prayed, sang Christmas carols, listened to poetry, watched recorded musical and dance performances by the students, and played trivia games, all online. I was asked to say the opening prayer, which I share with you as a prayer for you and all of us this year.

God of Christmas, Tonight we prepare for your coming with joy as we gather virtually to relish your good food in the good company of your people. We thank you that you have drawn us all to yourself in the human birth of Jesus and we ask that you bless us with continued growth into his image as you nurture our souls with your Word in this season, just as you nurture our bodies with this food of the season tonight. Let the Holy Spirit's work in our lives speed up the dawning of the day in which the earth will be resplendent in glory, and no one will ever be hungry in body or soul again. Your kingdom come soon, God. Give us a glimpse of it tonight so that we may love, praise, and honor you with all the saints as we go out from here in the next weeks to work and to rest until we come together again next semester. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.



Rafael and Lucille van Ommeren shared this photo of their Christmas dinners.

The next semester begins on January 17, and, just as in this past semester, you are invited to study the Book of Concord online with our Lutheran student, Rafael van Ommeren, on selected Monday mornings. The first opportunity will be on January 24 from 9-10 am (Eastern U.S. time), when I will be introducing the Smalcald Articles. If you have already been participating, I will send you the link. If you would like to begin participating, please let me know by email so that I can send you a link, too.

A previous newsletter contained an invitation and a link to watch my inaugural lecture as a new faculty member, but many in the U.S. were unable to do so because it was on Thanksgiving Day, which was just an ordinary Thursday in Jamaica. However, the technical team recorded it and has made it available, so if you would like to watch it, you can copy and paste this link into your browser: <https://youtu.be/jBkjbMHX3rs>. It lasts about one hour and the title is “Words for Our Time: The Reception and Re-working of a Christian Text in Egypt in Response to Historical Changes”.

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

1. To become a covenant congregation, download the form at ELCA.org/covenant form or call 800-638-3522, ext. 2820.
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