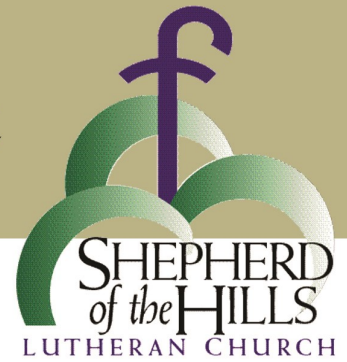


Shepherd's Voice



October 2020

"Stewardship 2020"

By Pastor Scott Searl

Friends at Shepherd,

Your financial gift matters. Even in our current pandemic situation we have celebrated the lives of the Saints of Shepherd as we gathered to give thanks for the lives of Joan Oyaas, Virgil Aarness and Dick Brubacher. We have confirmed three amazing young women whose lives and voices will bring God's hope to the world. We have started to explore our response to the events surrounding the death of George Floyd. And we have remained connected to our community through Meals on Wheels and our other local partners. While there has been so much keeping us apart physically, I know that God's love is present in the lives of our members and friends because of your gifts. Thanks be to God!

We know that these are strange and stressful times, and we are grateful for everyone who has continued to share financial resources. Your church council is working hard to ensure that we steward our ministry faithfully. With the receipt of a loan through the PPP program, your strong giving and managing our expenses closely we are in a good position financially.

Please prayerfully consider your gifts to God's ministry through our family for the coming year. Now more than ever our family of faith is caring for people who are anxious, stressed and challenged with school, isolation and loneliness. As a family of faith we can make a difference in the lives of members of our congregation and also in the community around us as we seek to be a hopeful voice in the current division.

God's people have faced many challenges, and God has always been faithful. As we consider our gifts we are reminded that God is still actively working in God's world. The powers of this age are not ultimately in control. It is God who has promised and God who has brought new life to Abraham and Sarah when all seemed lost. It is God who took a few loaves of bread and few fish and fed thousands of people. It is God who walked into death and rose from dead to prove that there is nothing that rules over God's love.

Your pledge card will be mailed to you. Please complete it and return it as soon as it arrives. We will officially celebrate our mission and ministry on Sunday, October 25.

In Christ,
Pastor Scott

**Shepherd of the Hills
Lutheran Church
500 Blake Road South
Edina, MN 55343
(952) 935-3457**

Staff:

Pastors	Scott Searl, Sherri Otto
Assistant/Visitation Pastor	Fred Jensen
Music Director	Emily Koski
Deacon	Brian Henning
Faith Community Nurse	Kaye Wothe
Administrative Assistant	Shawn Wacholz
Building Manager	Blair Prax

Church Council Members / Officers:

President	Todd Biewen
Vice President	Julie Luers
Treasurer	Steve Hanneman
Financial Secretary	Ryan Erickson
Secretary	Adam Driscoll
Serve	Nate Lichty
Worship & Music	Julia Buteyn
Building & Facilities	Peter Barott
Learn	Open
Communications	Jill Miller
Care	Dave Cousins
LMCC	Open
Evaluation	Chris Polston

Telephone & Voice Mail Extensions:

Worship Times	1
Directions	2
Shawn Wacholz	11
Pastor Scott Searl	12
Pastor Sherri Otto	13
Brian Henning	14
Blair Prax	15
Emergency Message Mailbox	24
Kaye Wothe	25

Shepherd Online!

Pr. Scott Searl	scott@sothchurch.com
Pr. Sherri Otto	sherri.otto@sothchurch.com
Shawn Wacholz	office@sothchurch.com
Kaye Wothe	kaye.wothe@sothchurch.com
Brian Henning	brian.henning@sothchurch.com
Blair Prax	blair.prax@sothchurch.com
Church web site	www.sothchurch.com

Prepare the Pavement: Capital Appeal 2021

As we headed into the current covid situation our church council had begun plans to replace our parking lot. Those plans have continued and we anticipate an appeal to raise funds starting in January of 2021. Pending a successful fund appeal, we anticipate that the work would be done in the summer of 2021. Both the asphalt of our parking lot and the concrete sidewalks have reached the end of their life. It is time to announce that God’s presence is alive and well in the people of Shepherd of the Hills. Not only will a new parking lot and new sidewalks improve the functionality of our building, it will be another example to guests, neighbors and visitors that the ministry of SOTH is vibrant and important! We are currently working on preliminary plans with our architect Kevin Busch. Nate Lichty on the church council and Pete Barott are our two congregational members leading the design work. Both Nate and Pete have experience with design and management of these types of commercial projects. We are grateful for their leadership!

As plans are developed look for more information in the months ahead. If you have questions, concerns or would like to provide support please contact Nate, Pete or Pastor Scott.

Congratulations and Blessings to our 2020 Confirmation Class!!

Front: Elizabeth Barott, Lily Mitchell, Danielle Hobbs
Back: Pastor Scott and Pastor Sherri





Going Somewhere Else

By Todd Biewen, Council President

President's Post

Hi Everyone. If you're like me, you are finding it harder and harder to watch very much news these days. I have landed on the word maelstrom as a good descriptor for me of our daily and weekly news cycles. Here are two definitions of *maelstrom*: 1) *a powerful, often violent whirlpool, sucking in objects within a given radius*; 2) *a situation in which there is great confusion, violence and destruction*. Either definition will do - it's clear to me that I don't want to get drawn into such a severe storm.

Do you know anyone that has a real affinity for the news these days? I do, and I'm worried about them. I know people who are sucked in by the daily news, to the point that their TV runs on cable news networks upwards of 12 to 15 hours each day. I also know of people who experience their highs and lows (more lows) because they are twisting and turning within the vortex that is the daily news.

I know what the daily news can do to my mood, and I know it's not healthy for me. Don't misunderstand, I still read some of the newspaper and watch some news and am well aware of the news of each day, but I can feel it when I've had enough. And then, I make a conscious decision that involves *going somewhere else*.

I'm going to guess most of us do this at some level; it's a strategy for coping. Where do you go when you *go somewhere else*? Is it a place away from home? Is it out for a walk? Is it a certain place in your house or in the yard? Is it far or near?

Actually, I'm not so much asking where you physically go, but where do you go in your mind and in your soul? What helps to take you away to somewhere else? Is it in doing nothing? Is it in walking or biking? Is it in doing yoga or in meditation? Is it in praying or spending time with your bible? Is it in listening to music, or in being with a certain friend or family member?

For me it is important to be able to separate myself from the daily news, because when I do this I usually find inspiration, or at least comfort. I am often reminded in doing this that there is a big difference between the world we live in and the world the news suggests we live in. I know there is so much that is good in the world, and I'm better able to find it and be reminded of this when I am with my own thoughts or with those people who are closest to me.

Going Somewhere Else continued

Just one example of the way my mind works is this: last week I decided to listen to some music while I was cleaning up the kitchen and I found something I hadn't listened to for a long time, the soundtrack from *Forest Gump*. It didn't take long and I was thoroughly enjoying myself while listening to the many familiar tunes. Many different lyrics spoke to me, but these spoke the loudest:

*C'mon people now
Smile on your brother
Everybody get together
Try to love one another
Right now*

Yeah, I thought, *love one another, love one another, right now*. This is what we do, this is what we are to do, this is what we need to do.

These words won't leave me and have been with me for days now...thank you Jesus, for opening my eyes to what is good in your world and for showing me time-and-again, that by *going somewhere else*, I find you.

Peace, Todd

In Memory

We extend our heartfelt sympathy to the family of Joan Oyaas on her death. We pray God's grace and peace in the days ahead.

Continued above

Staff Reflection

Seeds or Sod? continued

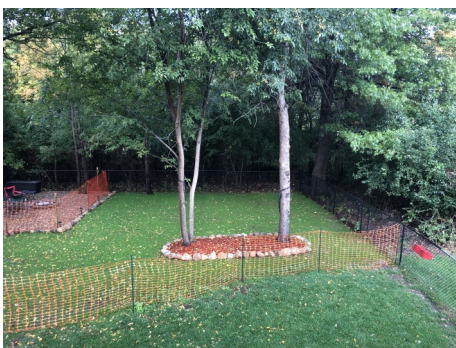
I pray today that God gives us patience to let our seeds grow where they may and in God's time. I pray that the seeds that we have scattered may grow in others and I pray that the seeds that are in your life, flourish into a beautiful, wonderful creation.

Oh, by the way, the seeds are still coming in wonderfully! No sod for us this year!! Thanks be to God!
Peace,
Pastor Sherri

Before



After



Seeds or Sod?

By Pastor Sherri Otto

As many of you may know, my husband Troy and I bought a house in Shakopee this Spring. When we purchased it, the backyard was mostly wooded, with a fence that extended back into the trees. After we took ownership, we found that most of those "woods" were Buckthorn. We uprooted the Buckthorn which left us with 7 trees and a dirt clearing where we could actually see the fence but also the woods behind it.

We made a fire pit in the corner of the lot and seeded grass in the dirt area. Day after day, we kept looking at the dirt and seed, wondering when we would see the little shoots of grass appear. And day after day, we were disappointed that nothing was happening. Two weeks had gone by.

One night while sitting around the fire, we decided that we would purchase sod as the grass seed was obviously not taking. We measured it out and talked about how much this would cost us. I remember feeling guilty for us taking the "easy way out" and felt strange about how I had fallen into the mindset of "we need this now".

The next day, we woke up, looked out the window and could not believe our eyes! There was grass shooting up through the dirt. It happened overnight!! But now what would we do? Continue with our plan for sod or wait patiently for the grass to come in.

This whole process got me thinking about my faith life on several levels and perhaps, you will be able to relate.

I wonder how many times God has planted a seed in my heart and because it did not grow right away, I covered it up with heavy sod so that it would be pretty and nice and ready to go for me to enjoy? I wonder if I would have been more patient, feeding and watering my soul, how much richer the outcome would have been? And I wonder if the appearance and ease of something often wins over patience and time, over care and diligence.

How many times have we asked God for something to take place, something to happen right away, something to change at a moments notice? All the while only thinking of ourselves and our wants rather than asking God what God wants or intends.

We live in a world that needs everything to happen in a moment and it grows harder and harder to just let things be, doesn't it? We charge ahead instead of thinking about the consequences of our actions. The point here is that we need to sit back, be patient and let God be God. Be patient with God, with oneself and with each other when seeds are planted. To sit back and enjoy the beauty of nature and not be in such a huge hurry to get everything done, to get everything right, to get everything perfect.

Continued above



“A Referendum on Human Dignity...”

By Deacon Brian Henning

It’s usually around mid-September every year that I get a very similar feeling in my gut: dread. What is it I dread? Well, it’s certainly not Autumn and the impending Winter. As you may know, I love the fall - flannel shirts, hot drinks, the beauty of Creation on display before us, fairs and festivals, and so much more about this cozy season. No, what I dread is really only one day of the entire year. Unfortunately for me, though, is that one day as co-opted a season that I truly love. If you haven’t guessed it yet, the day I dread most is Halloween.

I really do not like Halloween. I’ve never been a fan of dressing up in costumes. As a kid, the thought of going door to door to show off was more anxiety producing and overwhelming for me than joy-filled. I certainly do not like being frightened for no reason (to the point that it can be unconsciously rage inducing). Even watching a commercial for a horror film can be enough to give me nightmares for a week. I really do not like Halloween and each year I find myself wondering, “Can we just skip this month and move on the good holidays?”

Now, don’t get me wrong. As an adult there is nothing more enjoyable to me than seeing the joy in the kids as they get to enjoy the holiday. Every year I enjoyed seeing the creativity of our kids as they dress up and share what they have been dreaming of for the day. I think I could confess that being in kids’ ministry has refreshed my perspective of the day, though maybe just a little bit.

As much as I do not like the holiday, Halloween, I am enthralled, of course, with the other holiday that shares the date October 31st. I am speaking of All Hallows’ Eve, or as we Lutherans know it better, Reformation Day.

Reformation Day has always been a highlight for me and my family. I remember as a kid dressing up in red for Church and belting out, “A Mighty Fortress” with my parents. It was the most joyous day outside of Christmas Eve and Easter for my little country church in Pennsylvania. For us, it was a celebration of our Lutheran and German heritages and meant quite a bit to us Lutherans in a very Catholic part of the Country.

Many things have changed in my mind since then. I have learned much more about the Reformation and have come to understand the words of, “A Mighty Fortress.” I still look forward to the day, but also can’t help but notice the violent undertones to a movement about peace, grace, and a divine welcome to all. That disconnect is a tad unsettling to me as an older and wiser 27 year old.

Nevertheless, I have been pondering that auspicious day of October 31st and the movement that was begun on that day 503 years ago. For me, I see the Reformation Movement as one that tried to restore dignity to the people of God. Luther argued that God’s grace comes to us freely because

A Referendum continued

God loves us. Full stop. Because of this relationship with God that comes freely, Luther believed that all people should be allowed to read the Scriptures for themselves - to hear the Gospel not through the lens of power and authority, but within the context of community and relationship. Luther believed that unchecked power, both spiritual and temporal, had a tendency to corrupt the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the relationship of the Creator and the Created. The power inequalities at the time showed just how troublesome that dynamic was and Luther, embattled by the desire to know God, to care for the Church, and to care for God’s people, decided that 1517 was the year to speak out against the powers that were corrosive and harmful.

“A referendum on human dignity” is a phrase that was used by our September Wednesday Night Speaker Dr. Anthony Bateza as a description by some of our upcoming election cycle. It is a phrase that stood out to me and that I have carried with me. In our conversation, we discussed how the job of the care of the human soul has been placed within the hands of our government and how the government is not only ill-equipped to handle such a task, but in fact is deeply prone to failing at such a task. It is a question that I think we have all been tasked with answering this year. Where should the job of caring for human dignity lie?

For the first time ever, I do not want to skip October. In fact, I am looking forward to it. I am looking forward

Continued on page 11

SOTH BOOK CLUB

Book club at SOTH is open to all, male and female. Please feel free to join us. At this time we expect to meet on ZOOM for book discussions until the pandemic allows for meeting in person safely. I selected these books because I felt they were very well written, and often address an important topic, area culturally relevant or interesting time in history, etc. I will order 2-3 copies of each book to have available for pick up by contacting Shawn in the church office. All books will be available all year if you want to read ahead. Please read the book and return ASAP so another person can borrow the book for reading also. We try to get 2-3 readers to be able to read one copy.

For questions please contact Kaye Wothe, Faith Community Nurse at kwothe@comcast.net

Book Club Schedule

Wed., October 14, 6:30 pm,
"American Dirt"
by Jeanine Cummings

Wed., November 18, 6:30 pm,
"How To Be An Antiracist"
by Ibram X. Kendi



WoSOTH BREAKFAST

We expect to meet remotely until the pandemic allows meeting in person. We will meet on the ZOOM platform on Saturday mornings from 9:00 am to 10:15am. This will include the use of open discussion and at times

breakout groups. Some of our speakers will be live and others pre-recorded. We hope to have fun with some food sharing, etc. to add to our sense of community while we are physically apart. Suggestions? Questions? Want to attend but need technical help or device? Want to come but timing does not work for you? Contact Pastor Sherri (sherri.otto@sothchurch.com) or Kaye Wothe, Faith Community Nurse (kwothe@comcast.net).

Date: November 7, 2020
Topic: "10 Ways to Better Conversations",
Speaker: Celeste Headlee, radio show host, author and TED speaker

Description: In a time of strong and very polarized opinions, we are having a lot of important and stressful conversations everywhere we dwell. With the holidays around the corner it seems like a good time to consider how well you talk to people. You can learn a lot about how to have conversations from Celeste Headlee. Celeste has worked as a radio host for decades, and she knows the ingredients of a great conversation: Honesty, brevity, clarity and a healthy amount of listening. In this insightful talk, she shares 10 useful rules for having better conversations. "Go out, talk to people, listen to people," she says. "And, most importantly, be prepared to be amazed."

WEDNESDAY NIGHT SPEAKER SERIES

Date: Wednesday, October 7—6:30-pm

Topic: Mapping Prejudice

Speaker: Dr. Kirsten Delegard, Project Director

Description: This research is showing what communities of color have known for decades. Structural barriers stopped many people who were not white from buying property and building wealth for most of the last century. In Minneapolis, these restrictions served as powerful obstacles for people of color seeking safe and affordable housing. They also limited access to community resources like parks and schools. Racial covenants dovetailed with redlining and predatory lending practices to depress homeownership rates for African Americans. Contemporary white residents of Minneapolis like to think their city never had formal segregation. But racial covenants did the work of Jim Crow in northern cities like Minneapolis.

This history has been willfully forgotten. So we created “Mapping Prejudice” to shed new light on these historic practices. We cannot address the inequities of the present without an understanding of the past.

Date: Wednesday, October 21 from 6:30-7:30 pm

Topic: Ambiguous Loss During the Pandemic

Speaker: Ted Bowman

Description: Ted Bowman is an educator, author and consultant who specializes in change and transition, whether it occurs in families, an organization, or the community. His emphasis is on aiding people in utilizing their strengths and the resources of others in facing change and transition. He became an adjunct faculty member at the University of Saint Thomas in 2006, teaching a graduate social work course on grief and loss. This will be on ZOOM live.

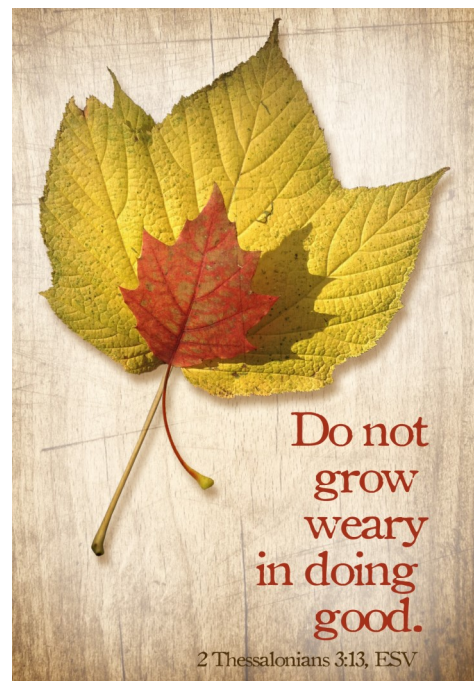
Date: Wednesday, November 4, 2020 from 6:30-7:30 pm

Topic: Ecological Justice and the Old Testament

Speaker: Dr. Ellen Davis

Description: Ellen F. Davis is Amos Ragan Kearns Distinguished Professor of Bible and Practical Theology at Duke Divinity School. Dr. Davis is the author of eleven books and many articles, her research interests focus on how biblical interpretation bears on the life of faith communities and their response to urgent public issues, particularly the ecological crisis and interfaith relations. *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), integrates biblical studies with a critique of industrial agriculture and food production.

A lay Episcopalian, she has long been active as a theological consultant within the Anglican Communion. Her current work explores the arts as modes of scriptural interpretation.



FLU SHOTS

Date: Sunday, October 4

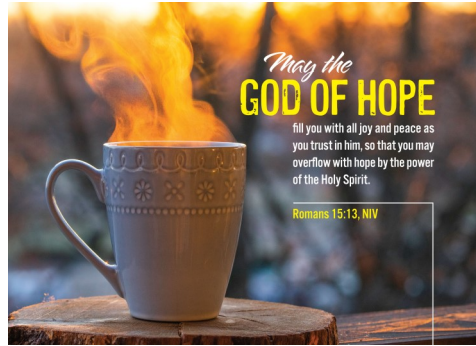
Time: 10:45 – 12:45 pm

Where: At SOTH

**Social distancing observed.
Please wear masks.**

This fall it is even more important to get a flu shot. If you get the flu it will be difficult to separate your symptoms from COVID-19 symptoms and will likely create confusion in treatment. Also if you get the flu you will be much more vulnerable to getting COVID-19. Getting both will likely make the average person extremely ill and make huge risks for spreading to others in your home and community.

Flu shots are scheduled in October in an attempt to ensure those receiving the vaccination are still able to have good response against the flu during peak flu season which goes through the winter. Getting it earlier risks not having an appropriate immune response to fend off the flu in the deep of winter.



If One More Person Talks to Me about Self-Care...

By Kaye Wothe, Faith Community Nurse

For years already, popular people in the media, clergy, friends, magazine articles, and self-help books have implored us to implement self-care

strategies and techniques into our days and lives. Often it is talked about in broad brushes with no examples, or with examples that do not fit anywhere into our personal spaces. Also, the louder voices in our heads get more of our attention and calendar space so self-care is the first thing to fall off our schedule. Then there was a pandemic... may I suggest self-care?

In the midst of the extra stressors of the pandemic-related frequent change, there are several things that strike me as important to survival. One is an anchor. Anchors hold the boat within a range, keeping it safe while still allowing some movement in each direction. Feeling able to move some but still be safe is important at every age. What is/are your anchor(s)? For me it includes my faith in God and the faith community I am in, my home and those I share it with, and the people whom I trust.

My faith is my anchor because it is where I believe the greatest amount of power, grace, call and the very basis of life is from start to finish. My faith community is my anchor because I trust it to be grace-filled, supportive, caring and discerning as a community about where we are called to be and act. My home and those I share it with is an anchor because it meets my primary need for safe shelter, a place I can control to some degree and be with someone to discern with, care for and be cared for. All these areas help me to be anchored and yet move in a safe space to still explore and have health and wellness needs met physically, mentally and spiritually. This is a base element of self-care.

Other parts of self-care often would include setting aside ten minutes a day to do something mindful that allows you to set aside fear, panic, the rush, demands and stresses of the day, in a very intentional way to have peace, rest, recovery, regain a sense of balance, safety, creativity and/or calm. The most commonly suggested ten-minute self-care activities include:

Deep breathing while closing your eyes and focusing on the breath, where it goes in your body and letting it open you up.

A relaxing walk, thinking about the nature around you, and not thinking about work, stressors at home, etc.

Writing in a journal. Simply sitting down and writing about your day without any pre-conceived plan, just letting it flow (including venting frustrations) with a sense of wonder.

Gardening while focusing on the plants, soil, and not life's stress.

Study some aspect of nature, i.e., birds, leaves, foliage, snow, bare tree branches, and wonder about them.

Continued on page 9

Self Care continued from page 8

Read poetry. Keep a book of your favorite poet nearby and read a poem or two in a focused, thoughtful way, wondering what the poet was trying to say through the poem.

Watch or listen to something that makes you laugh with little thinking. During the pandemic, we have recorded and watch “Wheel of Fortune” many nights, always competing with the contestants. It is something we can focus on for 20 minutes that makes us think but does not stress us out, yet instead distracts us for 20 minutes and allows us to shift gears out of a stressful day to a less stressful evening. Or a re-run of “Big Bang Theory”, which just makes me laugh without much thought and is only 20 minutes. Or your favorite 20 minutes of an old movie works.

Listening or playing music for many is very relaxing. What genre of music is relaxing to you? Can listening to it make a signal for you to let go of the days stress and connect with your anchor?

Do a devotion. Find a book, a daily email or a simple go-to devotion to access each day for just a few minutes. If you are like me, it will take you back to your anchor area, and you will comfort-float in the safe zone the anchor provides. (Ask us if you need help finding a devotion source).

What is the best time of day for you to spend these ten minutes? When will it benefit you most? For some it is the early morning, as they feel it helps them start their day in a good state of mind. For others it is the end of the work day as it helps them wind down and be more measured in their responses to the kids or others who will still demand attention in the evening. And yet for others, the best time is just before bed to help them relax and get to sleep. You may even benefit from two five-to-ten minute times for self-care at different times of the day.

This fall and winter, and possibly even spring, promise to be like no other any of us has experienced. Knowing that, this time demands that we take time to discern what things we can and cannot do, focus on our anchor and prioritize self-care for each person in the house, and make a plan for ways to accomplish that. For example, I know once the ice and snow begin, my walks will not happen or will be much shorter. What can I do safely to get outside instead? A lot of my friends are digging out old or buying new snowshoes and cross-country skis. Maybe music is your thing, can you take an online class over winter? Do you have devotion options picked out? Need a journal? Or a book on poetry? What free classes are there in the community you could take? (Check out UM Center for Spirituality and Healing online). Brainstorm a list of things you want to do over winter to look forward to, prepare for and keep you moving forward while still anchored.

Too many things on your calendar? What can you take off now in the interest of self-care? Remember, put your oxygen mask on FIRST so you can help others. These are great life skills to teach our kids too!

Continued above

Self Care continued

Last, keep talking! When I listen to experts on parenting, marriage, work stress, balance, and life in general, the thing I keep hearing is to keep talking. Keep talking to your kids to work through things you or they are worrying about. Keep talking to people in your community to decrease your isolation. None of us has it all figured out or is perfect. We need to keep talking, keep extending grace, keep having faith, and when we can't, we can ask others to keep faith for us until we can have faith again... but just keep talking!

Blessings as you plan for the days ahead, knowing where your anchors are and holding God's promises to receive each day's dose of hope.

Kaye Wothe
Faith Community Nurse
kwothe@comcast.net



Mental Health Connect Resources & Education

Mental Health Monday Speaker Series

“Understanding the Scope of Eating Disorders”

Speaker: Dawn Taylor, PsyD, LP Manager of Residential Services Melrose Center
Monday, October 12
6:30-8:00 pm via Zoom

The Monday Night Mental Health Speaker Series is free and open to the public. The theme for the 2020/2021 series is "Hope for the Journey". Join us on the 2nd Monday of (most) months to talk about important topics related to mental health.

MENTAL HEALTH CONNECT
Mental Health Resources and Education can be found on their webpage:
<http://www.mhconnect.org/events>



Let's Connect Thursday

Thursdays, 8:00-8:45PM

"Let's Connect" is a virtual community. We meet together via Zoom for a time of connection and discussion about how our week has been, how we're feeling, and we will share resources, encouraging one another. 2020 has brought us many unexpected challenges - isolation, working from home, layoffs, missing friends and family, stress and uncertainty are

just a few of the concerns we are experiencing. We NEED each other and a community to safely discuss life. If you have been longing for a group to connect with, like many of us have, join us each Thursday, beginning July 30th. A trained facilitator will lead the conversation. Free! All welcome! No registration necessary.

Mental Health Awareness & Wellness Opportunities

We are happy to provide opportunities this year to focus on mental health topics in light of the current pandemic.

Date: Sunday, November 15 during online worship
Topic: “Managing Mental Health During a Pandemic”
Speaker: Kristin Rewey, MSW, LICSW, Mental Health Therapist
Description: Kristen not only has active counseling experience in this area but also has been a guest speaker on podcasts, etc. on the subject. (She will be part of the sermon time in an attempt to lessen everyone’s time spent on Zoom.)



A Spirit of Confession

By Pastor Scott Searl

“We confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves.” I’ve been pondering these words from our liturgy over the past few weeks. I know that for some these words might seem confusing, even “old school” and irrelevant. But I think they are worth a second look.

One of the unfortunate casualties of our Lutheran reformation was the regular practice of confession with a pastor. I say unfortunate because in some ways I’ve wondered if we’ve lost an important part

of what it means to be human. I know that for some the idea of walking into a confessional with a priest brings back painful memories and even abusive memories, so I’m not suggesting that we make a return to unhelpful traditions. On the other hand, to regularly practice confession in a ritualistic way helps us to recognize our limitations, our faults, and the areas of life in which we are blinded. To confess and admit we have made mistakes is simply an act of telling the truth about ourselves, we are imperfect. And in fact, we are stuck in that imperfection. We are in bondage to our own limitations. We have this amazing ability to grow and change and learn and adapt, but unless we are given the grace of being told that our actions, behaviors and words have been problematic, how will we mature? In this way, confession feels like a potentially graceful act. An admission that is helpful. We get things wrong and with grace from each other and God we can grow more deeply into the person that God has made us to be.

Just as importantly, when we don’t practice regular confession we also don’t practice regular forgiveness. We rob ourselves of the great gift of hearing someone else remind us that love is stronger than our faults. In fact, it might be that it is our faults that allow us the opportunity to really know and love each other. Confession and forgiveness just might be one of the keys to deep, real, honest love. Practicing forgiveness is also an act of humility. When we forgive we don’t stand above someone morally? Instead when we forgive we recognize that we are in fact all made of the same dusty clay. The act of forgiveness brings us all back to earth, so to speak. When we forgive each other, we acknowledge that we are all sinners and saints all at the same time.

These practices of confession and forgiveness might be as important now as ever. I’ve noticed that I get so defensive these days so quickly. I’ve noticed that there are some who believe that acknowledging the racism of the past is either weakness or foolishness. I’ve noticed that we often stand over other human beings on some moral high ground and demean them. I’ve felt these things inside myself. Maybe you have too. I wonder how we might begin to practice confession and forgiveness with our family, our neighbors and our community. I wonder what would happen if in some small ways we began to try and infect the culture and community around us with a spirit of confession and forgiveness rather than a spirit of destruction? God calls us as a family of

A Spirit of Confession continued

faith to be a witness to the world that there is a better, more human and more divine way to live. We practice this spirit of confession and forgiveness regularly on Sunday mornings. How might you begin to practice confession in daily life? Can you imagine what our community might look like and feel like if we created a spirit of confession and forgiveness? I might imagine that it would begin to look and feel like the kingdom of God.

A Referendum continued from page 5

to the conversation about restoring human dignity and working towards a country that works for all. I am hopeful that the message of the Reformation will speak to us in new ways and a renewed fire towards grace for all. And no matter how the election turns out, I am hopeful that we will feel empowered, perhaps again or maybe for the first time, to participate in the civic life of our country. Because I believe the job of caring for the dignity and the soul of our neighbors really falls upon each of us. It is not a job to be thrown away or taken lightly and it is certainly not a job to leave up to someone else. It is the call of a Christian to be the body of Christ with the other members - welcoming them and showing them the grace of God that transforms us all.

Be sure to vote, whether in-person or by mail, and give thanks to God for the opportunities we enjoy to self-govern and work towards building the community God has envisioned for us since the beginning of time.

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2 CORINTHIANS 9:6, NIV