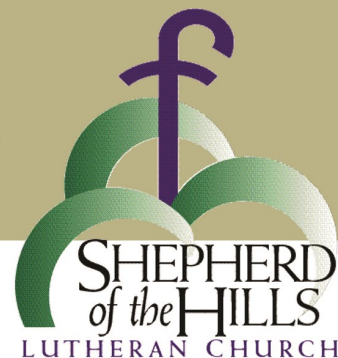


Shepherd's Voice



September 2021

“Ready, Set, Go?”

By Pastor Scott Searl

There are usually so many things that I'm excited about each fall. The state fair, back to school, our annual block party, the upcoming programming year, a full sanctuary... I'm sure you have your fall list. I'm disappointed that it doesn't feel as ready to go as I would like it. We're still wearing masks in worship, and the vaccines haven't yet been approved for our youngest students. It feels like another in-between time, and frankly I don't like it! I'm ready, let's go!

And yet, I'm still hopeful. I'm excited to see confirmation students again. I'm looking forward to our racial justice focus this year. I'm hopeful that the block party and all our other events will take place one way or another. Things are going to continue to happen, students will go back to school, work will continue, the fall colors will arrive, and the calves will be born at the state fair. At the same times it's going to be another few months where patience and flexibility are going to be very important.

I imagine that God feels this way all the time. There is so much hope for God's creation, so much promise and so much to anticipate. And at the same time there is much disappointment, sadness and frustration. There are beautiful babies born, and there are amazing grandparents who die. There are flowers that bloom and there are storms that destroy. There is anticipation of justice and peace, and there is the disillusionment of crime and punishment. I imagine that God must often feel like we're all ready, all set and then we go sideways somewhere, somehow and forgiveness becomes the only grace-filled response.

In all of it the promise is that God doesn't give up, God does not give in, and God keeps dreaming of a day when all of creation lives in harmony, wholeness and peace. Every time humanity or the world tosses in a curveball, God responds with love, and compassion. Sometimes with a stern warning, but most often with a welcome home and a new plan to redeem whatever has gone wrong. I am grateful for God's response. In my best moments I'm aware that God is still working to bring me to a place of wholeness, and hope. In those moments when I am aware, God's spirit is pulling, guiding, leading and even pleading... come this way, turn this direction, follow me. And when I do, there is a sense of hope.

As we prepare to return to things, let God's example lead the way. New plans will be needed, flexibility will be necessary. Give yourself a God sized break, it's never going to be perfect, it's going to be frustrating and it likely won't go to plan. Breathe, reflect, and rest in the truth that even God has to be flexible, even God has to have compassion, even God is surprised by the curveballs and covid's of the world.

Continued on page 2

**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
Intern Pastor	Anne Schaefer
Faith Community Nurse	Kaye Wothe
Administrative Assistant	Shawn Wacholz
Building Manager	Blair Prax

Church Council Members / Officers:

President	Adam Driscoll
Vice President	Don Wothe
Treasurer	Steve Hanneman
Financial Secretary	Ryan Erickson
Secretary	Christa Meland
Serve	Nate Lichy
Worship & Music	Julia Buteyn
Building & Facilities	Peter Barott
Learn	Stephanie Nordin
Communications	Jill Miller
Care	Dave Cousins
LMCC	Open
Evaluation	Chris Polston

Telephone & Voice Mail Extensions:

Worship Times	1
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Shawn Wacholz	11
Pastor Scott Searl	12
Pastor Sherri Otto	13
Intern Pastor Anne Schaefer	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
Intern Pr. Anne Schaefer	anne.schaefer@sothchurch.com
Shawn Wacholz	office@sothchurch.com
Kaye Wothe	kaye.wothe@sothchurch.com
Blair Prax	blair.prax@sothchurch.com
Church web site	www.sothchurch.com

Pastor's Message continued from page 1

Ready, set, go... and then be ready to go over there and maybe over there. The spirit of God will blow where it blows and you don't know which way. But you do know the sound of it! It is the voice of compassion, hope and love that beckon... I know you were all ready, all set, and now... we need to go over here instead. Blessings and peace as we all look ahead with hope to a new year of school, the state fair, calves being born, and new adventures. Ready, set, go...



PRESIDENT'S POST:

This Too Shall Pass

By Adam Driscoll, Council President

If you're like me, you may have found energy, optimism, and hope as restrictions related to our pandemic experience were lifting earlier this summer. We know that many in our congregation have gotten a ton of satisfaction from the resumption of in-person worship, and other activities that bring us together. So it is only natural that as the pandemic has heated back up with the Delta variant, we can be left with the opposite feelings of uncertainty, frustration, and perhaps listlessness. Early in the pandemic, a friend of mine pointed out an anecdote that has stuck with me for over a year: He said he recalled when reading testimonials from those who lived during World War 2, that throughout that period, people often felt the end was just around the corner. "This thing will be over by the end of the summer," or "Our boys will be home by Christmas" were common sentiments. When we look back now, we know that the US involvement in World War 2 was around 3 and a half years, but when people were living through it, there was no good way to know whether the end was a few months away or years away. Some day the pandemic will truly be over, and after time passes we'll look back knowing precisely how long this period lasted. In the meantime, we understand that this experience comes with peaks and valleys, we can learn to live, for example, with a return to some restrictions during worship. We gained many coping skills in the past year and a half, and we can call on those if we have a step back after a few steps forward. Take care of yourselves and each other.



PREPARE THE PAVEMENT

Building and Parking Lot Update

Work on our parking lot should begin sometime in September. We will be approving contracts the last week of August. Thanks to all who came to our special meeting to approve our financing. In addition, work to replace our roof and hvac equipment should also begin in September. These roof and hvac repairs are paid for by insurance from a hail storm last summer. Thanks to all who help care for and maintain our church home!

SAVE THE DATE

Flu Shots at SOTH

Date: Sunday, October 10, 2021

Time: 10:45 – 12:45 pm

Where: At SOTH with social distancing.
Please wear masks.
More details to come.

SOTH Book Club

Book club at SOTH is open to all, male and female. Please feel free to join us. We have 2-3 copies of each book. 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

Sun., Sept. 19, 7:00 pm
"Small Great Things"
by Jodi Picoult

WEDNESDAY AM BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday morning Bible Study resumes on September 15! Come for Bible study, food, and fellowship! The Wednesday morning group meets at 9:30 am for coffee, treats and fellowship before they begin a Bible study. The Bible study begins at 10:00 am and is based on the following Sunday's sermon text. All are welcome.

High School Group

Sept. 12 and 26

High School Youth Group will meet from 4-5:30pm on the patio of Shepherd. If you have any questions, contact Pastor Sherri or Pastor Anne.



2021 SOTH BLOCK PARTY! September 12!

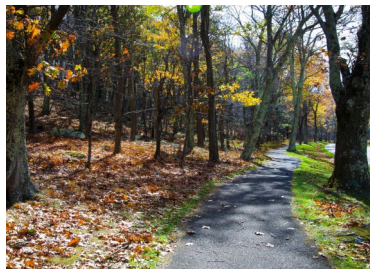
SOTH will be celebrating our Annual Block Party to kick-off Fall programming on Sunday, September 12 2021 following 9:30 a.m. worship.

We are excited to welcome everyone back to church, and we are hoping that our annual block party event gives us all an opportunity to welcome our neighbors to join us. Fun outdoor games, food provided by SOTH (no pot luck this year), and entertainment for all ages! Festivities begin at 10:30 am immediately following 9:30 am worship and include:

- Great food by Mary Jensen. She has spent the last year thinking up great things to cook and bake! Big Bell Ice Cream truck will make an appearance!
- Activities for kids, a 70 foot obstacle course, a corn hole tournament with prizes, and Mini-golf!
- Music, Bingo and more!

Be sure to put September 12th on your calendar now. 9:30am worship. 10:30 block party!

We ask that unimmunized members of the community wear masks for their protection and ours!



The Path of Peace Walking Ministry

Tuesdays, 9/14, 9/21, 9/28 and 10/5, 6pm.

Come experiment with a new spiritual discipline! Join Pastor Anne on four Tuesday evenings this fall to spend time walking in

nature as we walk through images of nature in the Bible. We plan to meet at Lone Oak Park (5624 Shady Oak Rd., Minnetonka), listen to a Bible passage and contemplative questions, then we'll wander as we wonder about the text. We will end our time each week by gathering back together for a short discussion and prayer. The passages and questions are provided in a book by Becca Stevens called "The Path of Peace."

Come alone or bring others; walk fast or walk slow; walk and talk or walk in silence...make this discipline work for you! This is not an exercise class, rather it is a time to walk and ponder and be reminded that God is on every path.

Tuesdays, 9/14, 9/21, 9/28 and 10/5, 6pm.

Please reach out to Pastor Anne with any questions!



WAM NEWS and CHANGES

I am **excited to announce the changes** that will be happening with WAM this year. Instead of the students meeting on Wednesday evenings, we will now have **WAM take place on Sunday mornings**. After the Children's Message, the students will be excused to go to their classrooms where there will be a time to read/hear a Bible story, create crafts, play games and sing songs. Parents will then be able to pick students up from their classrooms after worship.

For those students who would like to participate in Holy Communion, we will dismiss them during that time, or we will bring communion to the classrooms.

The age groups will be **broken down into three categories**: 3- and 4-year-old, Kindergarten to 2nd grade and 3rd grade to 5th grade.

We are **looking for volunteers** who would like to **serve on a team** consisting of 3-4 people to teach WAM. As a team, you can take turns and would not need to teach every Sunday. **Talk to your friends and make a team!** The curriculum will be laid out simple with everything you need for a successful morning. We will have a night of training for volunteers so that you are comfortable in your role and fully equipped.

Please register at www.sothchurch.com/register. There is not a button that takes you to the form so you will need to type this in manually once you are in SOTH's website. Thanks! If you have any questions, please contact Pastor Sherri at sherri.otto@sothchurch.com

IMPORTANT DATES FOR WAM

- **September 12 - Blessing of the Backpacks** Calling all students to bring your backpacks to church. We will be doing a blessing as you start off the school year and giving out backpack tags to all students.
- **September 15 – Parent Orientation for WAM and Confirmation at 6:30pm**
- **September 18 – Learning about the Bible at 10:00am** Students will learn about the Old and New Testament, Books of the Bible, how to look up verses and stories up in the Bible and have some fun and games too! Parents are encouraged to attend with their student.
- **September 19 – 3rd Grade Bibles Presentation** We will be presenting our 3rd graders with new Bibles.
- **September 23 – Volunteer Training for WAM at 6:30pm**
- **September 26 – First morning of WAM** Students will come to church and be excused after the Children's message to their classrooms.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN CONFIRMATION!

Students in grades 6-8 are invited to join us on Wednesdays this fall to study God, the Bible, faith, Church, culture and ourselves! What does it all mean, and how does it all fit?! Let's dive in together!! Every student is welcome! We will be meeting most Wednesdays from 6:30-7:30 at SOTH (outside as much as possible, and in the basement of the parsonage when it gets too chilly). Please register so that you can be sure to be included in the email communications. You can register on our website at SOTHChurch.com/register.

Our first gathering is on Wednesday, Sept 15th at 6:30pm. This first night is for both parents AND students! We will be asking parents for their help leading small group discussions this year on Wednesday nights. More information about this will be discussed at this parent meeting.

We will continue to be mindful of the best health practices to keep all of our students and families safe. In addition to CDC and ELCA recommendations, we will be in close touch with The Return Team at SOTH in regards to meeting in person. If we cannot safely be together, we will meet via Zoom. Please watch your email for communication about this! We will also communicate via Remind, so watch your phones for an invite to join that class!

We look forward to spending this time with our middle school students! Please reach out to Pastor Anne with any questions!

Wednesday Night Adult Education

We are excited to announce our Wednesday Night Adult Education Speaker Series will continue this year. The first speaker will be on Nov. 3. We plan to meet in person but for those who prefer, a Zoom connection will also be available. Dinner will be served at 5:30 pm. on all Wednesday nights with guest speakers (including the Racial Justice education nights). As with all plans being made during Covid times, we will make adjustments as needed. All are welcome, kids and adults. Speakers start at 6:30 pm. We hope you will join us!

SOTH EVENTS BOOKLET FOR 2021-22

Our events booklet for 2021-22 will be mailed out in early September. It is packed with information on all our special events and guest speakers for the upcoming year. We encourage you to look it over and mark your calendar for all the events that interest you.

Racial Justice Education Series

With a grant we received from Augsburg College, we have hired three consultants to help us make our next faithful move toward racial reconciliation: David Scherer, Joe Davis and Justice Feldman. These three talented folks will be with us in worship on Sunday mornings, lead educational opportunities on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings. They will help facilitate some strategic thinking and planning with our church council and staff. And they will be helping to lead us to new ways of thinking and being in the world both as individuals and as a family of faith.

We hope you will make every effort to participate in this unique opportunity. We have much to learn about our history and ourselves.

Date: Sunday, September 19, 2021

Topic: Racial Justice Kick Off Worship and Adult Education

Speaker: Joe Davis and Dave Scherer, JUSTMove

Description: Are you ready for worship that moves the body and the soul? This JUSTmove Worship Experience weaves together music, dancing, and poetry to usher participants of all ages closer to the heart of a God of all people. Come and be inspired as we participate in a traditional liturgy with a contemporary flavor.

Date: Wednesday, September 29, 2021 at 6:30 pm

Topic: "From Perfection to Progression"

Speaker: Joe Davis and Dave Scherer, JUSTMove

Description: As we seek to dismantle harmful systems of oppression in Jesus' name, how do we move beyond our own fear and dive into the work, propelled by the grace of God? In this session we will begin to learn about how God is calling us into the work of anti-racism and interculturality in a way that gets away from toxic perfectionism and into a gracious invitation to love.

Mental Health Awareness Sunday

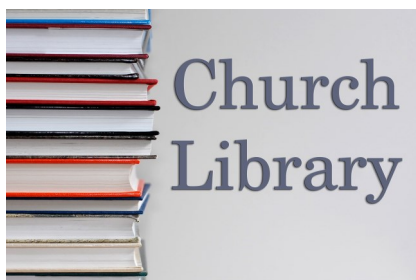
Date: Sunday, September 26 at 9:30 am

Speaker: Sara McGee, Relate Counseling,

Topic: "Mental Health: The Parent Child Dynamic"

Description: Information will be provided for us to understand the internal brain-body states that are most likely to produce certain behaviors in children and families and in ourselves. With this awareness, we learn to consciously manage our own thoughts and emotions so we can help children and families learn to do the same. The goal of this model is to provide a simplified brain model as a means for increasing our self-awareness so we can respond consciously to the needs of the moment. We will discuss how to emotionally plug into children and family as a way to support connection and cooperation.





The Library Excitement

The SOTH library has been located on the many book shelves lining the conference room walls.

To say it is rare to see a book borrowed in many years is an understatement. The book dust had taken over the air of the room. SO I went through the books, keeping books that contained SOTH historical information, old classic theology references, all bibles, hymnals, etc.

The books removed are on display in the Adult Forum room for anyone interested to review and take as many as they would like. The books will be there for the taking through the September 12th block party. Then they will be donated appropriately to a local organization by volunteers of the book club.

NOW on the library book shelves of the conference room there is a shelf of books about mental health-related information, books helping us understand issues surrounding race, some newer books regarding theology and the church, parenting books, health-related books, books on various life stages including many caregiving-related books, extra copies of book club books from the past year, devotional books of various sizes, etc. The staff will continue to add carefully to this collection.

There is no formal process for borrowing a book; it is all honor system without a specific timeline to borrow. Borrow it, read it, when you are done with it, return it to a designated return shelf.

PLEASE do not make the library a dumping ground for books you are cleaning out of your house. If you feel you have books that would be relevant for the library, please reach out to me to discuss. Please do not just leave them there.

Thank you!
Kaye Wothe
kwothe@comcast.net



**IMMIGRANT
MINISTRY**

Since SOTH became an AMMPARO welcoming congregation over a year ago, I have had the opportunity to attend several virtual

informational and training sessions about immigration. One of the presenters in particular made an impression. He was Pastor Emmanuel Jackson from Living Word Lutheran Church in Katy, Texas. An immigrant from Liberia, his father (also a pastor) taught him while growing up that whenever there's a need, and you have the capability of meeting that need, that need is God's call to your life in that moment.

I cannot help but feel that our sponsorship of an asylum seeker is God's call to our lives in this moment. Thank you for being so supportive of this ministry.

Paul Bohnsack



mental
health
connect

We help open doors

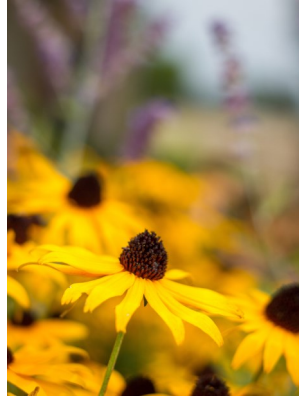
MENTAL HEALTH CONNECT
Mental Health Resources and
Education can be found on their
webpage:
[http://www.mhconnect.org/
events](http://www.mhconnect.org/events)

Staff Reflection and Youth News

At Every Turn continued

This can be difficult to do when I'm also trying to be a wife, a mom, a step-mom, a student, a friend, a daughter, a neighbor... Boundaries are a buzz word in the modern workforce, and yet pastoring doesn't have an on/off switch. My lesson here is still developing – how can I live into this call to caring for the people that God has given me in a congregation while not forsaking the people that he's also given me in my family and personal life. Are there boundaries? How can I be faithful to both? I'm thankful to my internship committee and the other pastors on staff here who have listened and helped me process this lately.

Grace and Peace!
Pastor Anne



AT EVERY TURN: Insights from the Intern

By Intern Pastor Anne Schaefer

Welcome to my little corner of the world. As an intern pastor, I am learning a great deal about what it means to be called to ministry. Each month, I will use this newsletter space to reflect on the wisdom that has come my way. I will likely learn a great deal about God, the Church, this congregation, faith, myself and grace. Thanks for being part of my journey!

Lesson #1 this month: The more things change, the more they stay the same... I'm currently taking History 2 this summer. I have been diligent about my reading since this class is being done as an independent study, and my class time is spent one-on-one with my professor. I've learned that in each time period since the Apostles were first sent out, people have vied earnestly for others' souls. For many, the fight has been life or death believing that salvation is only possible if the person believes something specific about God. The death toll is evidence of this desperation to save each other... or be on the right side of history. It's too close to call.

It's not just modern day Taliban or ISIS; this is what Christians have done to each other for centuries. The weapons change, the punishments change, the groups and people change, but everyone believes they're doing right by God.

This lesson isn't just a "history repeats itself" kind of thing... it's the realization that I don't know where or how I fit into this view of history. I do not feel so passionately to force others to believe exactly as I believe, but I don't want to be so despondent that the love of God appears smaller than it is. I think that learning how to have faith is finding enthusiasm for God's unending forgiveness without worrying over others' salvation. Perhaps the equation is passion + grace – fear = Trust in God. It doesn't seem difficult, yet every time period in history suggests that it must be.

#2: Many years ago I was hiking with a friend who is a pastor. I lamented about having to pack up and go home Saturday because we both worked at churches on Sunday. His reply to me was something like, "Really? I love Sundays because I get to be with my people." As a young Youth Director, I hadn't made that connection on my own yet. Pastoring isn't just a set of responsibilities listed on a job description; the nature of a pastoral call comes from the core of the pastor. Being a pastor is who we are as well as what we do.



RAISE YOUR HAND!

By Pastor Sherri Otto

When I was in grade school (many, many years ago!) I remember the teacher at the front of the room, asking this question, “Who wants to volunteer to help me?”

Almost every hand in the room shot up, not knowing what we were being asked to do, but wanting to be picked by our teacher. There was something about pleasing them, about helping them, about being noticed by them that made each of us raise our hand. And maybe it had something to do with competition, just to see who could raise their hand the fastest.

I think about this and wonder when “wanting to volunteer” changed. At what age did we quit thinking about helping out another person? When did we start to think about ourselves and what we would get out of whatever we were being asked to do?

I think my idea of volunteering changed when I had my daughter Emily. I wanted to be involved in her life, wanted to know her friends, wanted to see her faith grow. And so, I volunteered for things at school and at church, whenever I could. It was hard because of my work schedule. It was hard because I never really knew what I was getting myself into. It was hard to make that commitment to show up each week. Volunteering can be hard.

But it can also be the most rewarding thing you will ever do! I truly believe that no matter what you volunteer for, you walk away with something bigger than yourself. You learn something new that you had not known before. You feel joy, which is so needed in our lives today.

I always said that teaching Sunday School was one of the things that taught me more about who God is than anything else I had done up to that point. It was the chance to see God show up in the little faces of children who would ask questions and be silly and do wonderful art projects that wowed you every time. It was an opportunity to relearn the Bible Stories, to see who Jesus is and how he lived and loved through the eyes of a child. It was the experience of feeling the Holy Spirit work through the children and move through me and others around me.

As we enter a new year of worship, learning, community and outreach, open your hearts and minds to volunteer at Shepherd and raise your hand! It will be hard, it will take some time, it will be challenging. But it will be the best decision you make. I promise, you will be changed!!

Peace,
Pastor Sherri



NURSERY COORDINATOR NEEDED

If you love little children, please consider volunteering to work as the Nursery Coordinator. This work would include creating training for those who would want to work in the nursery and scheduling for Sunday mornings. This is a great opportunity to show the youngest here at Shepherd, how much they are loved and cared for. If you are interested, please contact Pastor Sherri at sherri.otto@sothchurch.com.



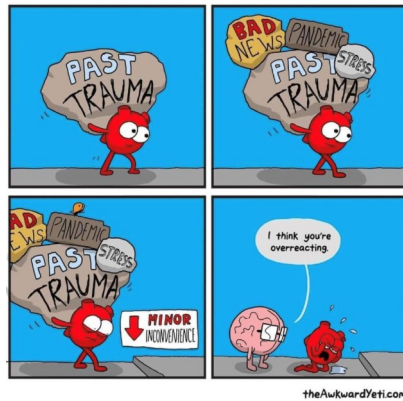
Living in Hope (Pt. 2) continued

I am increasingly happy with the work of Mental Health Connect, a faith community collaborative SOTH is involved in financially, SOTH members on the advisory board and Ambassadors, etc. There are TONS of resources on their website from suggestions to many events (all can be attended virtually so very low risk and take less time). I find even topics I have learned a lot about before, when hearing another speaker, I hear new things, or am reminded of important ways that help me. Do not let yourself be talked out of “attending” these. When we are struggling with our mental health, it is really easy to talk ourselves out of listening to these events, do what it takes to convince yourself to stick with your plan to attend in whatever way works for you. Below are some of Mental Health Connect website links that I find most helpful.

<https://www.mhconnect.org/>
<https://www.mhconnect.org/events>
<https://www.bethlehem-church.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Mental-Health-Monday-Poster-2020-2021.pdf>

Make time to talk with friends, family, and a professional therapist regularly to help you vent and process the life events that are weighing you down emotionally. This is normal. There is no badge of honor for not seeing a therapist, actually just the opposite. I personally much more admire someone who takes time and makes the effort to get the self-care they need in order to optimize their life experience and be a better person in the world because of it.

Schedule time in your calendar for the above activities and other self- and family-care and conversation.



Living in Hope

By Kaye Wothe, Faith Community Nurse

For the last 18 months, the feelings like fear, despair, loneliness, isolation, too much togetherness or not enough, have mingled with feelings like hope, new beginnings, possibilities, returned freedom, starting over... and then the cycle repeats itself. The constant feeling of inability to plan with confidence like we used to, to have a sense of power over our lives like we imagined we did, and have the freedom to

move and be with a sense of relative safety, is much of the time exhausting. I hear people who have ignored the warnings all along say they did it to maintain their mental health. I hear others who largely followed the recommendations and got vaccinated say they did (do) it to preserve their mental health. I hear people say they won't get vaccinated as it maintains a sense of personal freedom, and others say they get vaccinated to help their ability to move about with freedom and help the community and world do the same. While we recognize we are clearly divided on many fronts (which is also very emotionally exhausting), it seems to me that we all share the need to care for our own mental health. Ignoring the care of your mental health greatly impacts your physical health, relationships, and wastes precious time feeling bad. Please do not ignore caring for your mental health. SO how and where can I begin?

Simple things (you have heard these from me before, but I think we are at a peak of stress again so I want to remind you and me of these practices and resources).

Take time to (can be as little as five minutes):

- If you feel yourself start to spiral, step back, take a few deep intentional breaths, and get your footing again.

Make a list of three good things from your day (we call this What Went Well). If you can, in addition to naming each item, also describe Why it Went Well, as this adds to the positive energy it brings you. Writing them down and talking them through with others adds to the boost you get from recognizing and naming them.

Do a short devotion. Recently I discovered Daily Grace (produced by Women of the ELCA). You can get it sent to your email daily or put the app on your device. They are short, good theology, and help ground me for the day in a good place. Look at: <https://www.womenoftheelca.org/blog/category/daily-grace>

Or, there is a daily bible verse you can get at <https://www.elca.org/Faith/DailyBible>. My advice when looking for devotions is to be careful, as the most common ones out there in print or online are based in prosperity gospel theology and not a good fit for us as Lutherans, generally.

Take a walk or move around physically for even a few minutes. Get outside if you can, as research shows movement, fresh air and light help our emotions greatly. The biggest mistake I see here is people think if they can't go out for a longer time, they do not go at all. Any time is better than none! GO! If you cannot move around outside due to injury or safety from falling, just sit outside for a bit.

Living in Hope (Pt. 3) continued

It is as, or more, important than anything else on your calendar! It also makes all the other things on your calendar better, you better and more efficient at them.

Take time to consider what your strengths are and list them on paper. If you cannot come up with them, ask someone close to you to help you list your strengths. Keep the list in a place you see readily in your day. When you are ready, consider a strength you want to add or build on and set baby steps in place to work on it. During unusual times like these, all of us need to access new skills to remain resilient and even flourish. Pick just one and work on it. Give yourself grace to fail. Remember the baseball rule, you are not out until you have three strikes. Or even better, the forgiveness rule, 70 times seven (Matthew 18:21-22). You get lots of chances to make it work! Remember God began a good work in you!

If your immediate reaction to things is a negative mantra in your brain, work to re-wire that response. This requires mindfulness to stop the negative response as you feel it coming on, then to have a new better response ready to replace the old negative one. One exercise for this is called ABCD. A is to name the perceived adversity, B is to name the identified belief around that adversity, C is to name the consequence your belief has on you, and D is to dispute that response and see it more clearly, or if you cannot do that, re-wire your brain to a happier distraction, like get up and move around or turn on some music you enjoy or just change what you are doing at that moment until another time when you have more strength, or get help to dispute it and rewire. An example: My adversity might be: I do not agree with, and do not ever feel respected, by my brother-in-law. When I encounter him, a negative mantra wants to immediately flood my brain and start a negative stream of emotions. My belief is: we will never agree, he will never give me the respect I deserve, but I do not want to be at odds with others. The consequence is, I waste a lot of negative emotional energy every time I encounter him, which makes my physical self feel bad and makes me irritable, and is hard on my relationship with my spouse who needs my help to not villainies his brother. How can I dispute this process? I can make a list of my brother-in-law's positive traits, I can decide to not judge him as incapable of change or being open at some point to other ideas, I can try to see it from his point of view, which is different from mine, and consider why his perspective is different, even just to avoid experiencing all the negative emotional drain. If not, when it comes up, can I go for a walk, turn on some good music or do something that transitions me out of the thought cycle? At least beginning to re-wire my brain from having an automatic negative response. A common thing many are experiencing in this way is the disagreement about pandemic-related issues and political issues. Many are sick of talking about it as it creates a negative drain on our emotional bank with seemingly nothing changing. I suggest you try to re-wire to protect your mental health in these situations.

PRAYER! Prayer puts us in conversation with God. Speak your mind freely, listen even harder for direction or discernment. What behaviors were role modeled in the New Testament for us by Jesus while He was on earth? We are not Jesus; we are fully human and will fail at times. Jesus cared for loved sinners with humble hearts who recognized they needed help from their God. Pray while you walk or move, while you drive, make dinner, lie down to go to sleep, rise for the day, or when and where it works for you. There is no right or wrong here! As the Nike ad says, Just Do It!

Living in Hope (Pt. 4) continued

Think about what circle of community you spend the most time in. Think of the irrigated field. The irrigation or watering device moves in a circle, leaving the corners of the square field dry, not growing and thriving, maybe even dead. Be in a community that waters you, feeds you, helps you grow in ways that are life-giving for the harvest. God calls us to a life abundant. Are you in the right community to grow your life crop?

Talk to your pastor(s) or Faith Community Nurse. We care about you greatly and have resources for more help as needed.

Hope, Faith and Love... the greatest of these is Love. Love requires grace, whether it is love for another or love of self. In times of high stress, trauma, loss, and frequent change, self-care is required to maintain our ability to give others and ourselves grace and love. I believe we are called to this kind of care for others and self. I pray for strength from God to live this way and forgiveness for the many times I do not. Grace allows me to try again. I still will fail somewhere, but I hope I have the strength to keep trying. A forgiving, caring community helps me feel seen, find grace that sometimes I have not even been able to give myself, to move forward one step at a time. A caring community is my touch with experiencing Jesus on earth.

Here, struggling with you,
Kaye Wothe
Faith Community Nurse
kwothe@comcast.net

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
500 Blake Road South
Edina, MN 55343

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