

**Gold Hill Evangelical Lutheran Church**

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**Empowered by the Holy Spirit,  
United to Serve**



**Montana Synod News**

**The Montana Synod is curating information and resources on the Montana Synod Website**

Click [HERE](#) to be taken to the COVID-19 resource page. There you will find information released by the Synod office, resources, and tools for your congregation.

**Update from the Synod Staff**

For reopening questions please click [HERE](#) for Bishop Jungling's pastoral letter and addendum on the Synod website.

The Synod office will be closed until May 8th, then open and staffed on May 11th. **Our hours will be limited to the public from 12-4.**

All staff travel has been cancelled until at least May 26 unless it's an actual emergency. We don't want to spread anything to you or bring it back to our homes; nor do we want to catch anything and have to stop serving you. So please, continue to stay in touch with staff through email, phone calls, and through the regular Zoom opportunities available to you.

Bishop Laurie

If you need to contact the Synod staff, please consider their email or cell phone. That information can be found on the [Synod website](#).

**Words from the Bishop:  
Let Us Pray ...**

"The congregation that **prays** together, grows together." When you read this bit of wisdom and think of your congregation or ministry, what do you feel? Anxious?

Afraid? Ho-hum? Excited? In her book *Thrive: Spiritual Habits of Transforming Congregations*, Montana theologian Ruth A. Fletcher lifts up **Prayer** as the first habit practiced by healthy congregations. And I think that's true for a healthy ministry and a healthy synod as well.

"Prayer connects [people] to the power and presence of the Spirit that resides and among them," she writes. **Prayer**, especially today, is a crucial way that Christians enter into the living, healing, empowering presence of God.

But perhaps for this very reason, **prayer** also frightens us. We worry that we're not saying the right words or speaking to God in the proper way. We feel awkward because we just don't know what to say and we aren't sure God is listening anyway. We fear giving up control and want to avoid the "let go, let God" that **prayer** requires.



**LINKS:**

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**CHURCH COUNCIL**

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And yet **prayer** is a wonderful gift from God. **Prayer** is a proven anxiety reducer, fear calmer, and relationship-with-God creator. **Prayer** frees us to rest in God without having to fix anything. **Prayer** inspires spiritual growth and empowers us to be God's hands and voice in the world. **Prayer** does "work" ...just not always in the way we think it should. It doesn't solve our problems like a magic spell; but it does open us up to the power of God who transforms our lives -the good, the bad, and the down-right nutty - in amazing ways.

So, as we journey together through this time of discernment and transition into what it means to be Church during and post-Covid-19, I call on the people of God in the Montana Synod to **PRAY**. **Pray**, as Paul suggests "without ceasing." (1 Thess. 5:17) You might ask, what shall I pray for? Try this list for starters...**Pray for** yourself first, then your congregation, then the Synod and the ELCA. **Pray for** an open heart and mind. **Pray for** wisdom and guidance. **Pray for** eyes to see God working in the world around you. **Pray for** ears to hear God's gospel proclaiming. **Pray for** humility and a positive attitude. **Pray for** the ability to trust, hope, and love God first, then each other and yourself. **Pray for** neighbors, family, and friends. **Pray for** strangers, the "different," and yes, even enemies. (Why?! Cuz Jesus says so! Mt 5:44) **Pray that** "God's will be done," not "my will be done," in our lives on earth, and in heaven. **Pray that** God's Spirit may come among us and breathe new life into Christ's Church so that each member of its community may courageously fulfill God's purpose in their corner of the world.

And how might you **pray**? Well, that's finally between you and God. But here are some suggestions:

1. **Pray** with listening ears and an open heart so that you may discern the Spirit's presence in your life apart from all the other voices.
2. Start with the **prayers** you know like the Lord's Prayer or prayers that are readily at hand, like the Psalms (they are called "God's Prayer Book" for a reason).
3. **Imagination prayer**: imagine with all of your senses that you are at a scene in the Bible such as Jesus praying in Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-46) or Paul writing a letter to one of his congregations (Philippians 1:1-8). Then ask what the Spirit is saying to you as you immerse yourself in this scene.
4. **Centering prayer**: sit in complete silence with your eyes closed, breathe slowly and regularly, and focus on a word/phrase to invite God's Spirit into your midst.
5. **Contemplative prayer**: focus on something in God's creation, breathe regularly and slowly, and allow it to reveal God's purpose for you and the Church.
6. **Divine reading prayer**: very slowly read through a Bible passage three times, the first time for understanding the passage, the second time listening for a word or phrase that speaks to your life, the third time listening for how that phrase might guide your/our actions.
7. **Moving prayer**: pray while walking, exercising, or moving around in some way so that your body is kept busy while your spirit opens itself to God. (Ex. Labyrinth)
8. **Conversational prayer**: talk to God, Jesus, and/or the Spirit like you're sharing with your closest friend. Go the distance and talk out loud. If you're afraid of funny looks, put your cell phone to your ear...nobody will know the difference!

These are just a few ideas. There are infinite ways to **pray** and there is no one right way. God doesn't really care how we do it, just that we do it. And our congregations, ministries and the Synod need it! So please **pray**...and experience the power of the Holy Spirit transforming us in exciting ways.

Bishop Laurie

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### An important reminder:

As you decide to reopen your worship space, please check with your insurance company for liability coverage. Insurance companies that have been consulted by congregations have indicated that if a congregation does not follow federal (CDC), state, and local guidelines closely, the

insurance company may drop coverage and will not cover the congregation in the case of a lawsuit. Also remember that if a lawsuit for a Covid-19 related death is filed, it will most likely include not only the congregation, but also the individual pastor and individual council members and perhaps even the synod. While it may be difficult for any plaintiff to prove "gross negligence," just the hassle of being named in a lawsuit and responding to it may be enough to deter you from opening before you are ready. So, consult your insurance company before you open!

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### **COVID-19 Update and Church Reopening Considerations from the Perspective of an Epidemiologist**

St. John's United and the Billings area ELCA Clergy has invited the Montana Synod Leaders to join in a discussion this Thursday at 6:30pm with Dr. Mark Stibich, PhD MHS FIDSA Chief Epidemiologist and Partner, Forefront Lifecare, to talk about the state of Covid-19 in Montana and our congregations. Among other things, this will focus on:

- Summary of contagion
- Physical distancing strategies
- Effective sanitizing practices and solutions
- Ideas for church-specific practices

Please contact [Candi](#) in the Synod office if you are interested in attending.



### **Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp News**

Read FLBC's COVID-19 updates and find resources [here](#).

We will continue to share any updates on our [website](#), our Facebook & Instagram pages, and through our E-news.

**The Summer 2020 Early Bird Discount deadlines have been extended!**

You now have an additional month to register at the Early Bird prices! Register by May 1st to receive \$50 off & register by June 1st to receive \$25 off! Register today [here](#).

**Be sure to keep up with our [social media pages](#) as we post Virtual Campfires, First Words, and more!**

Instagram: Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp

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### ***Gold Hill Lutheran Church Welcomes You!***

***Are you looking for a place to connect with a faithful community, grow in faith, and put your talents to work in serving others? Look no further, we welcome you at Gold Hill Lutheran Church! To learn more about the mission and ministry of Gold Hill Lutheran Church, please contact us at 406-723-4242.***