



BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Rev. Peder J. Johanson, Pastor

January 2021

We are never alone

As seen in the December 2020 issue of Living Lutheran

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The room was spare and dimly lit. We sat on folding chairs in a circle—young Honduran women and some of us from the ELCA. We had come to Honduras to observe the work of AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities). This is the ELCA's strategy to help youth who have been forced to flee their home countries because of violence, abuse, extortion by gangs and extreme poverty. *Amparo* is the Spanish word for shelter or refuge.

In this case, AMMPARO partnered with the Lutheran World Federation and the Mennonites to resettle returned migrants—those who had tried to seek asylum in the United States but had failed or had been denied and deported back to Honduras.

One by one they told us their stories of fear and desperation. Not a one undertook the long and dangerous trek north on a whim. They told us about the abuse they had suffered, about family members who had been killed by gangs, about the inability to make a living because of the extortion by organized crime. They talked about the bitter sadness of leaving home and family, and the uncertainty of the future.

I remember one young woman in particular. She was pregnant when she tried to migrate to the United States. She had the baby somewhere along the way. She was far from home, mostly alone and desperately wanted her mother to be with her. None of this is what she had hoped for when she was growing up. Circumstances beyond her control had forced her into this new and strange existence. She and her baby were now back in Honduras—but not at home. Home was too dangerous.

Remember last Christmas? Remember all of the preparations, the travel to be with family? Remember the holy beauty of the Christmas Eve liturgy and receiving Christ's grace and forgiveness at his table? The shopping and Christmas caroling? The in-person gatherings? All that has changed.

The pandemic hasn't forced us from our homes but into our homes, sheltering in place, isolated. Not together, but physically distanced. Not gathered with family and friends, but forced apart because of the threat of infection. Forced by circumstances beyond our control into this strange existence. Oh, there will be Christmas carols piped into grocery stores and other essential services, but they will be painful reminders of how life used to be.

We are reminded of the experience of the exiles in Babylon: "By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captives asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land" (Psalm 137)?

I told the young Honduran woman about another young woman who was forced to leave home because of a government decree. She, too, was pregnant and made a long and difficult journey. She, too, was far from home and without her mother when the baby came. She had to find shelter wherever she could. This wasn't what she had hoped for when she was growing up. Circumstances beyond her control had forced her into this new existence.

Continued on next page....

Bishop Eaton's message continued....

That young woman was Mary and the child was Jesus. Precisely in our distress, in our dislocation, the Lord shows up. Emmanuel—God with us—makes his home in the very places we find foreign or isolating. The young Honduran woman, and all of us, can find hope because of the birth of Mary's child. There is no God-forsaken place and we are never alone— not in hospital rooms, or sheltering in place, or Zoom calls or on dangerous roads.

Many of us will not be physically home for Christmas, but we are truly home in Christ.

Two Ways to Worship

As we gather in our homes during this period of social distancing, there are two options for worship. One is by **video, prepared and posted to our Facebook page** each Sunday morning. The other is a **live feed on Zoom at 9:00am on Sunday mornings**. Our Zoom Meeting ID is 321-764-3018. To access Zoom from your phone, dial **1-312-626-6799** (this is a Chicago number) and when prompted, enter the Zoom Meeting ID given above, followed by the # key. The password is our zip code, 53520. You do not need to enter a user ID – if asked, simply press #. To access via the app on your smartphone or computer, select “join” and enter our Zoom Meeting ID and password, or use this link:

<https://zoom.us/j/3217643018?pwd=WkJOUdBueERCQII4dWQySDhabkZWZz09>

In Christian Sympathy

Elizabeth Ann Schooff

December 15, 2020

A message from Pastor Peder...

If you would like pastoral conversation via phone and/or zoom, Pastor Peder is still available during this time of separation. You may contact Pastor to schedule an appointment at 608-346-2676 or you may email him at:

pastor@bethlehembrodhead.org.

Notes of Appreciation

A big, heartfelt thank you to all who contributed toward my bee-ooo-ti-ful poinsettia plant!

Norma Vernon

Happy holidays everyone. Thank you for the beautiful plant. —Bud and Mavis Coomer

From Beverly Vogel—I am enjoying the lovely red poinsettia! Thank you very much.

JANUARY FAITH NIGHT

Join Donna and Bailey for our January Faith Night on Wednesday, January 20 at 6:00 pm. We will be meeting live via Zoom (see the log in information below). We will continue to learn more about The Lord's Prayer. Bailey and I are working to put a new materials bag together for our January - April Faith Nights. We will be reaching out to each of our Faith Night families in early January to arrange a pick up or a delivery. We are so excited to see everyone!! If you have any questions, please call or text Donna at 608-314-5834.

Our Zoom Meeting ID is 816 7344 6568 and passcode is 856816. To access Zoom from your phone, dial 1-312-626-6799 (this is a Chicago number) and when prompted, enter the Zoom Meeting ID given above, followed by the # key. You do not need to enter a user ID – if asked, simply press #. To access via the app on your smartphone or computer, select “join” and enter our Zoom Meeting ID and password, or use this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81673446568?pwd=ak5BNjgveW9md3hJamFZRmtSMGppdz09>

A NOTE ABOUT THE BEACON NEWSLETTER

We will take a break from the monthly newsletter after this issue. For the time being announcements and information will be passed along via the weekly bulletin emails. If any of you have such news items or announcements, please send them to Pastor Peder at:
pastor@bethlehembrodhead.org.