

Innovation For Times Like This

Rev. Lisa Smith Fiegel, Alaska Synod director for evangelical mission

Across the country and the church, leaders have been plunged into innovative ministry. Being church together looks different during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this difficult time, many leaders have found energy and new life in imagining new ways to be church and share the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is at work!

In case you missed it, our ELCA churchwide partners had just launched a new initiative toward innovation. Mikka McCracken, formerly of ELCA World Hunger, was named in December as the ELCA's Executive for Innovation. Mikka reports that the primary task of innovation is to start with empathy and listening. We need to know the challenges people are facing before we collaborate toward innovative solutions.

Across the Alaska Synod, leaders have been listening in congregations and communities to hear the needs and work together for the sake of church and community. Here are a few examples of new and innovative ways synod leaders have been working to collaborate, connect and share the Good News.

Virtual, online worship is happening from Brevig Mission to Ketchikan, and many places in between. Many are using Facebook Live or YouTube. Zoom coffee hours have sprung up in several locations. Pastors Erika Bergh (COSLC-Anchorage) and Liz Lowry, (Hope-Anchorage), hosted a synod-wide youth group meeting via Zoom last week. COSLC also hosted a "creating a sacred space at home" online workshop that included some guided crafting time. As a reminder for those doing online worship, make sure to post your licensing permission before you begin. During COVID-19 days, Augsburg, CCLI and One License are offering free copyright permissions.

For some, online worship has become a collaboration. At Resurrection in Seward, Pastor Ben Bohart has done ecumenical worship with colleagues. Some congregations will share online Holy Week services. Worship is happening parking-lot style, too. Joy Lutheran in Eagle River will have a Palm Sunday "parade" around the parking lot (in cars) while waving palm branches. Interim Pastor Karen Sonray hopes to have a bullhorn! Delta Presbyterian/Faith Lutheran in Delta Junction is exploring parking lot worship for Easter Sunday. In another part of the synod, the Seward Peninsula Lutheran Ministry Association will host a modified version of Spring Conference April 1-5, hosted on the Our Savior's Lutheran-Nome Facebook page.

Many congregations are finding new ways to serve and to collaborate for those in need. At Lord of Life in North Pole, the sewing group is switching to masks. They've invited others to join in the cutting of fabric and elastic and for help ironing and washing the masks. The same is happening at Joy in Eagle River.

In Sitka, the ecumenical Manna Meal for those in need will still distribute food, but will do it by pick up service instead of dine in. The same is true of the food pantry at Shepherd of the Valley in Juneau; food is available only in “to go” bags.

What innovations is your congregation trying? What are you curious about? What are you learning? How can that learning be shared and utilized in the future beyond COVID-19? Your synod office staff are available as conversation partners for things you’re exploring and here to encourage you in ministry. The Holy Spirit is inviting us into new ways to be the church in the world!