

Hope and Service Through COVID-19

Typically when I write my messages for *The Servant*, I try to focus on just one of Lutheran Congregational Services' (LCS) programs. COVID-19 has impacted all aspects of our lives, and the same is true for Lutheran Congregational Services, as well as Liberty Lutheran's family of services. Liberty Lutheran, the parent organization for LCS, serves older adults across five senior living communities with varying levels of care, and the West Philadelphia Senior Community Center (WPSCC).

Through the network of churches in the Northeast and Southeast Penn Synods of the ELCA, LCS has supported older adults throughout these family of services as well as organizations serving individuals and families most at risk through COVID-19. This support is thanks to generous contributions of over 1,300 fabric face masks, hundreds of them sewn by members of congregations across eastern Pennsylvania.

Additionally, the Lutheran Disaster Response - Eastern PA (LDR) program of LCS continues to lead efforts for delivery of donated hand sanitizer and other PPE to congregations and churches. And most critically, LDR continues to respond to disasters from the time of impact to long-term recovery.

Another impact of COVID-19 has been the effect of social distancing on the economy which has created food and housing insecurity among thousands. We continue to partner with Lutheran helping agencies to support organizations as they are seeing increased need. We also continue to partner with Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania to make sure the rights and voices of the most vulnerable are not ignored.

When floods and fires occur amidst this pandemic, creativity kicks into high gear and we are grateful for partnering churches as they walk with their

communities through these difficult times. Flooding from Isaias left hundreds with homes destroyed in Lehigh, Monroe, Philadelphia and Delaware Counties. Partners from Interfaith networks are helping to keep families safe as they repair their homes or seek new housing, a journey that can take months.

Our faith is rooted in response to the Good News. This is a time when we are called to bring that faith to the brokenhearted. Sylvia Havlish will be conducting bereavement counseling in a small group session this fall. The session is in person and those who have lost a loved one are welcome to join. Sylvia also facilitates a closed Facebook group, "Journeys through Grief," for bereaved individuals.

A new spiritual and emotional care webinar is also available from Lutheran Disaster Response. Additionally, LCS is able to offer our Lay Eucharistic Visitor Training program virtually as sharing Communion means so much to many of us. We invite congregations to participate.

Thank you for your masks, your leadership in your own communities, and your support of LCS. We must continue to find hope in one another and in the promise of the resurrection.

Sincerely,



Julia Menzo
Director of Community Outreach



Julia Menzo

Grieving Through COVID-19: Insights from a Professional Grief Counselor

Through times of loss, it is human connection that brings us comfort and hope. Sylvia Havlish, a professional grief counselor for over 40 years, hosts grief groups in partnership with Lutheran Congregational Services (LCS) for bereaved individuals. Within these groups, Sylvia facilitates a safe space where individuals can explore their feelings of loss while learning the various stages of grief and how to journey through them.

Since the start of COVID-19, Sylvia has had to put her grief groups on hold. While she's unable to meet with the people she counsels in-person, her continued commitment to helping those who are grieving remains strong, and she understands that through these challenging times their need for support is greater now more than ever.

Different Dimensions of Grief: Sylvia's Advice on What You Can Expect

1. Shock, Denial, Numbness, Disbelief
2. Disorganization, Confusion, Searching, Yearning
3. Anxiety, Panic, Fear
4. Physiological Changes
5. Explosive Emotions
6. Guilt and Regret
7. Emptiness, Sadness, Depression
8. Release

Connecting at a Distance: The Importance of Keeping in Touch with Your Support System Through COVID-19

For bereaved individuals in quarantine, not having the comfort of a hug or human touch, as well as the absence of closure with no funeral is remarkably challenging. Sylvia says that during this time simply having someone to talk to is incredibly important.

"People grieving really just need someone who will listen," says Sylvia. Listening to people who have experienced various kinds of loss, Sylvia knows that now especially, individuals who are grieving need a



strong support system around them. "Through this pandemic, the best thing for people grieving is to be in touch with their loved ones and friends and to tell them when they're having a tough time, and to ask them for support," she affirms.

Whether it is through FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, or a regular phone call, Sylvia says that staying connected with your support system, even virtually, is essential. While she acknowledges that reaching out to your support system is often challenging, usually friends and family are more than willing to help. "Asking for help can be hard, but it's so important to tell people what you need from them."

Sylvia says that for those who are grieving through COVID-19, finding some kind of routine is also important. "It won't be what you had before, but instead of laying in bed all day and not getting dressed, which leads to depression, get up and take a shower and go about your day. It is so important to be in the land of the living even when you don't feel like it."

If you or someone you know is grieving through COVID-19, visit Sylvia's private Facebook group at www.facebook.com/groups/journeysthroughgrief or contact Sylvia Havlish at 610.395.5045.



Sylvia Havlish

Serving Food and Hope to Neighbors in Need

Amidst these uncertain times of COVID-19, Hope Lutheran Church in Reading Pennsylvania has provided more than food for their neighbors in need. Serving as a source of hope and encouragement for their community, the Church continues to operate its food pantry and feeding ministry in safe and creative ways. Their outstanding efforts with food assistance in a time of crisis demonstrates their dedication to lead God's people and do God's work to support vulnerable individuals through these challenging times.

Pastor Mary Wolfe has been with this congregation for over 13 years. She explains that many of the Church's neighbors experience poverty and unemployment. While they struggle even through the best of times, the circumstances surrounding the crisis of this pandemic have made their typical challenges severely overwhelming. "It is vital that we not only remain on the ground offering assurance and presence but that we step up our efforts to provide the assistance our neighbors need," Pastor Mary affirms.

Certainly stepping up their efforts, Hope Lutheran Church saw a dramatic increase in their community's need for food assistance since the start of the pandemic. "The food pantry went from serving an average of 200 families twice each month, to serving 350 families. This change happened very quickly," Pastor Mary adds.

As a result, Hope Lutheran Church saw its food distribution expenses for the pantry more than double overnight. Thanks to a \$30,000 grant that was awarded to Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) – Eastern PA from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Hope Lutheran Church's feeding ministry along with three other feeding ministries in Eastern Pennsylvania will receive part of this funding to help them meet the needs of their community.



Pastor Mary Wolfe and grandson.

With a team of over 20 volunteers from the congregation, as well as support from local businesses, restaurants, and churches in the area, the way the community has come together through these challenging times has brought comfort and hope to this neighborhood. "Our volunteers are amazing. They're so involved and everyone from the community has really risen to the challenge," says Pastor Mary.

As the community comes together in remarkable ways, Pastor Mary is thankful for the support that LDR grant will help to provide for Hope's food pantry. With hot meals costing over three dollars per person, finding sufficient funding for food has been a challenge. "The grant has given us encouragement that allows us to believe if you are participating in God's work in the world, then the means to continue to do that work will be provided," she concludes.

In addition to Hope Lutheran Church, the other three food ministries receiving assistance from the LDR grant are Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Food Pantry in Dingmans Ferry, Pottstown Cluster of Religious Communities, and Feast of Justice in the Mayfair neighborhood of Philadelphia.



Does your church have a team interested in flood cleanup and repair?

Let's connect!

Contact Julia Menzo via email jmenzo@libertylutheran.org



Lutheran Congregational Services

c/o The Lutheran Center
2354 Grove Road
Allentown, PA 18109



LCS will host virtual training for Lay Eucharistic Visitors on October 3, 2020

Those participating will be mailed a guidebook prior to the training. Participants will be asked to read sections of the text prior to the training day (instructors for sessions are ELCA pastors).

Instructors will be using Zoom to deliver the training, which will last about two hours. Participants will be asked to complete some follow up work and a final virtual check-in before the training certificate is issued.

Training will discuss options for how to deliver the Eucharist in times of social distancing.

Fee for the training is \$25.00.



To register or learn more about this opportunity please contact Julia Menzo at jmenzo@libertylutheran.org