

The Mission of Christ the King

To Shine the light of Jesus, Reflect his unconditional love, and Mirror his kindness to all people.



www.CtKTwinsburg.com

READ ALL ABOUT IT!

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LENT BEGINS ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17TH

On Ash Wednesday we begin our forty-day journey toward Easter with a day of fasting and repentance. Marking our foreheads with dust, we acknowledge that we die and return to the earth. At the same time, the dust traces the life-giving cross indelibly marked on our foreheads at baptism. While we journey through Lent to return to God, we have already been reconciled to God through Christ. We humbly pray for God to make our hearts clean while we rejoice that "now is the day of salvation." Returning to our baptismal call, we more intentionally bear the fruits of mercy and justice in the world. *From Sundays and Seasons*



Because of the continuing pandemic, CtK's Ash Wednesday Worship Service with Holy Communion will be a drive-in service, broadcast on 90.1 FM, at 7 PM, February 17th. CtK will not offer ashes this year at worship or throughout the day. Also, CtK will not hold weekly Lenten Soup & Sandwich Suppers this year.

MIDWEEK LENT PLANS SHAPING UP

Pastor Matthew will record Weekly Midweek Lenten Devotions on Wednesdays from February 24th through March 24th. The theme for the series will be *Created for Community*. Pastor Matthew will lead CtK in reflecting on what it means to be in community with one another, with the world, with creation, and with God. At press time the method of recording the devotions was not certain. Watch your email and the *Weekend Messenger* for specifics.



LAST CHANCE FOR 2021 PHOTO DIRECTORY PICTURE SITTING



Because not many families were photographed in November, a photographer from Universal Church Directory will be back at CtK Monday, February 22nd, from 2:00 to 8:30 PM with pandemic protocols in place. To be photographed, you must sign up for an appointment. You can set up an appointment online by following these steps:

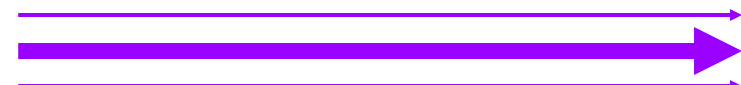
- Go to Universal Church Directory website: ucdir.com
- Select **Photography Appointment Scheduling Login** on right side of page
- Enter CtK Church Code: **OH2410**
- Enter CtK Password: **PHOTOS**
- Click on the date/time you prefer, and enter your name

You may instead submit your own photo; see page 2 for details. Everyone whose photo is included will receive a copy of the finished directory.

Members were asked via either email or US mail to verify their contact information for the roster that is part of the directory. This new directory will also add access to a password-protected app of a CtK phone directory.

DRIVE-IN ANNUAL MEETING TO BE MARCH 28TH

The Annual Meeting of the Congregation will be a drive-in meeting Sunday, March 28th, at 10:30 AM, and will be broadcast on 90.1 FM. The primary order of business is to approve the 2020 Annual Report of the Congregation. Everyone is encouraged to stay after worship so that a quorum is present.



2020 YEAR-END GIVING STATEMENTS ARE COMPLETE

2020 Year-End Giving Statements have been processed. Members with email addresses received theirs electronically. All others were sent via U.S. mail.

Please advise me if you need a paper copy or if you did not receive yours by the end of January.

Sandy Molnar, Financial Secretary



SUBMITTING YOUR OWN PHOTO FOR DIRECTORY



Photo submissions for the 2021 Ctk photo directory may be either digital (JPG file) or printed. Digital files must have resolution of at least 600x900. If you want to submit your own picture, email the digital copy to wgibbons@ctktwinsburg.com or give a printed copy to Wendy by February 14th. She will then send you the form that must be completed for all submissions.

Council stated that Ctk will pay Universal Church Directory's \$10 per photo fee for submitted photos, but you may reimburse Ctk by designating *Submitted Directory Photo* on your giving envelope.

SHARE YOUR COLOR & DESIGN APTITUDE

If you have an aptitude for graphic design and color, your gifts could help create an attractive 2021 photo directory for Ctk. If you have these gifts and some free time, please contact Pastor Matthew. There will be a meeting to discuss the directory format with the directory representative at 10:30 AM Tuesday, March 9th.

CTK BLOOD DRIVES CONTINUE TWICE A MONTH

On Tuesday, February 2nd, the Red Cross will hold a blood drive at Ctk from 12:00 PM to 6:00 PM. Ctk will also host a drive on Tuesday, February 16th, from 10 AM to 4 PM. The Red Cross has announced a critical need for blood donations at this time. Donors, make an appointment at redcrossblood.org. because the schedule has been filled at recent drives, and there is not room to wait for an appointment.. All donations are tested for COVID-19 antibodies. (There is no deferral time for recipients of Pfizer or Moderna vaccines.)

On January 5th, 42 pints of blood were collected from 36 donors. This may be a record for Ctk, and these donations will help over 120 patients! On January 19th, 35 pints were collected.

Thanks to the Ctk Council for approving these additional first quarter 2021 blood drives:

- Tuesday, March 2nd, 12 - 6 PM
- Tuesday, March 16th, 10 AM - 4 PM

If you are interested in registering donors for an hour or two during any drive, please contact Wendy in the office and she will connect you to our Red Cross liaison.

Every Sunday evening...

...a Twinsburg-area church serves a free Community Meal from 4 to 5:30 PM. (Meals are carry-out only during the pandemic unless noted below.)



Location Schedule

1st & 3rd Sundays - Good Shepherd Christian Church, 9571 Shepard Road, Macedonia

2nd Sunday - Faith United Methodist Church, 2560 Post Road, Twinsburg - limited indoor seating is available; **their clothing pantry is also open.**

4th Sunday - First Congregational Church, UCC, 9050 Church Street, Twinsburg

5th Sunday, including January 31st - Christ the King Lutheran Church, 10285 Ravenna Road, Twinsburg

All are welcome for a free meal! (Social distancing is observed.)

FREE COMMUNITY MEAL AT CTK JANUARY 31ST

Ctk will host a free community meal on Sunday, January 31st, from 4:00 to 5:30 PM. The meal will be carry-out only because of the pandemic. Mary Ellen Robinette is the meal coordinator and received a grant from Thrivent Financial to purchase food. Talk to Mary Ellen if you'd like to help; space is limited because of the pandemic.

CHOOSE LENTEN DEVOTIONAL FOR 2021

An array of Lenten devotional materials will be displayed on a rack near the mailbox hallway this month. Publications exist for kids, teens, families, and adults. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 17th.



DIRECTORY

Christ the King Lutheran Church

10285 Ravenna Road
Twinsburg, OH 44087

330-425-7377

www.CtKTwinsburg.com



Reverend Matthew Groenke, Senior Pastor
pmatthew@CtKTwinsburg.com x109

Kevin Basom, Director of Music

Linda Mondry, Saturday Worship Musician

Wendy Gibbons, Office Administrator
wgibbons@CtKTwinsburg.com x102

Email Wendy to receive this publication via email.

FROM THE SENIOR PASTOR

FEBRUARY 2021

"Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it."

(1 Corinthians 11:17-18)

"Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." (1 John 3:18)

"Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2)

We are living in a very contentious time right now in our country, full of strife and disagreements. Arguments are being made discussing what is true, what can be trusted, what can be believed. Many of you reached out to me after watching the violence of the events of January 6th and expressed fear, outrage, and confusion about the future of our country. "Where is God in all of this?" This was one of the questions posed to me and this became part of my prayer life leading up to the inauguration on January 20th in our nation's capital.

The verses that I included at the top of the page speak to the inevitability of conflict between people in a community, but also about the choices made by each of us which will then heighten the conflict into combat or lead to a different outcome. God is always present in our daily lives through the power of the Holy Spirit, even when things look bleak and hopeless. We are part of the body of Christ, and as such are called to live as a new creation. Part of living this new reality is the realization that it is Christ who defines us, His death and resurrection are what bring life abundantly and eternally in God's reign. Our political party affiliations, our voting preferences, our assumptions about others who do not share our same points of view or opinions cannot have the last word. God has the last word, in the cross and empty tomb of Jesus Christ. That is the good news that we are privileged to share with a broken and hurting world.

One of the phrases that my bishop in Nebraska taught me was that **"Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional."** The truth of the matter is that our words and our actions matter. Every week at Christ the King we answer the question of what is our mission with these words: ***"To shine the light of Jesus, reflect his unconditional love, and mirror his kindness to all people."*** As we live out this mission with each other I have a helpful acronym focusing on the need to respect ourselves and others as we build relationships and foster the beloved community God is creating in and through us.

R – Responsibility for what we say.

E – Empathetic listening skills.

S – Sensitive to different communication styles.

P – Ponder what you hear and feel before you speak.

E – Examine your own assumptions and perceptions.

C – Confidentiality is kept.

T – Trust ambiguity, knowing that we are not only here to debate who is right or wrong.

Living in God's amazing grace,
Pastor Matthew Groenke



HEART STRINGS

Celebrate friendships and connections with Christ the King during the month of February.

Celebrate that you chose to support CtK’s ministries and programs.

Celebrate that with the uncertainty of the pandemic we remain open with outside worship services.

Celebrate that we have accepted the changes necessary to maintain a healthy environment for our staff and members.

Celebrate your generosity which pulls at our heart strings and makes us grateful that you’re part of our community.

*Sandy Molnar
Financial Secretary*

SPRING ENDOWMENT GRANT REQUESTS DUE MARCH 28TH



Endowment Grant requests for spring are due in the Endowment Committee mailbox by Sunday, March 28th. Request forms are kept in that mailbox. Areas for which funds are granted include Seeding, Evangelism, Matching, Outreach, and Emergency. Please be sure to complete the entire request form.

If you have any questions, speak to a member of the committee: Katie Bach, Kristin Bedford, Rich Ciarniello, Denise Hall, and Jay Hartland.



COLLECTIONS AT CTK

In January 2021 CtK received \$5.25 for recycling 16.5 pounds of aluminum cans. Since 2015, 311 pounds, have been recycled for a total of \$110.

The St Pauly Used Clothing Shed reopened in late November after being closed in August due to the pandemic. CtK received \$118 for December and a total of \$1264 in 2020. Since April 2014 CtK has received \$7439.

River Valley Paper’s recycling bin in the parking lot is emptied every other Friday. Wendy will include the emptying date on the weekly calendar in the *Weekend Messenger*, and you can also find the date on the CtK calendar on ctktwinsburg.com. While the bin is often overflowing before the scheduled emptying date, we do not get enough paper to be paid. (If you ever come to CtK and the bin is full, Dodge School has two bins and may have room, saving you another trip.)

ANNUAL REPORTS DUE SUNDAY, MARCH 7TH

Ministry leaders are reminded to complete their 2020 ministry reports and send them to Wendy in the office by Sunday, March 7th, so that she can complete the annual report booklets to review before the March 28th Annual Meeting of the Congregation.



CTK COUNCIL BEGINS 2021 WORK

The 2021 CtK Council was installed at worship Sunday, January 10th. The council includes President Mike Coss, Vice President Katie Bach, and members-at-large Bob Coleman, Glenn Fasnacht, Sally Morris, and Karen Reid.

At their January 13th meeting, Karen Reid agreed to continue serving as Council Secretary through 2021. Mike Pereksta was approved as CtK Treasurer, and Sandy Molnar was approved to continue as Financial Secretary.

Liaisons were assigned to each CtK ministry:

Ministry	Council Member
Christian Education	Sally Morris
Congregational Care	Karen Reid
Endowment Fund	Glenn Fasnacht
Evangelism	Glenn Fasnacht
Finance	Katie Bach
Outreach	Karen Reid
Pollinator	Bob Coleman
Property	Bob Coleman
ROCK	Katie Bach
Stewardship	Mike Coss
Worship Team	Sally Morris

RECYCLING INK CARTRIDGES AT CTK

CtK has a Giving Center bin for donations of used ink cartridges to be recycled. This collection began many years ago to benefit CtK Youth. Proceeds still benefit CtK Youth, and Denise Tiearney has been the coordinator of this for the past several years. Please contact Denise with questions about this project.

DECEMBER 2020 FINANCE REPORT	
<i>Complete financial information is posted on the kiosk outside the office.</i>	
Operating Income	\$16,678
Other designated income	\$1,774
Total Income	\$ 18,452
Operating Expenses	\$14,924
Other payments	\$1,359
Total Expenses	\$16,283
Net Surplus / (Deficit)	\$2,169
Monthly Budget	\$16,040



CONFIRMATION CLASS IN FEBRUARY VIA ZOOM

Pastor Matthew will lead the February Confirmation Class via Zoom for all 7th and 8th graders from 6 to 7 PM on a Sunday to be announced. Pastor Matthew will give you the link if your student is interested.

7TH—12TH GRADERS ZOOM TO SUNDAY SCHOOL

Mr. David Schiopota, the leader of the 7th - 12th grade Sunday school class, hosts a weekly Zoom group for the class from 4 to 5 PM on Sundays. Please contact David if your student wants to participate.

FAITH WEDNESDAY STUDY ON ZOOM

Pastor Matthew leads a Bible study at noon on Wednesdays via Zoom. Contact Pastor Matthew at pmatthew@ctktwinsburg.com for the Zoom invitation to the class. Everyone is welcome to participate

LINKS TO FAITH FORMATION RESOURCE EMAILED WEEKLY

On Fridays, Wendy emails a link to the weekly *taking faith home* resource while we are unable to hold in-person Sunday school.



Nathan Stayanchi	3-Feb
Madelyn Ripley	7-Feb
Heather Spaeth	13-Feb
Patti Jabre	14-Feb
Bill Zarembo	14-Feb
Dolores Poulton	15-Feb
Katie Bach	17-Feb
Olivia Doty	18-Feb
Diana Cerny	20-Feb
Mike Nezbeda	20-Feb
Charlie Stayanchi	20-Feb
Rae Kendrick	21-Feb
Rachael Stahlman	22-Feb
Mitch Harrison	23-Feb
Danielle Smith	29-Feb

Shining the Light of Jesus...

...by maintaining the St. Pauly Used Clothing Shed since 2014: Karen Reid

...by recycling aluminum cans since 2015: John Gibbons

...by leading the December 27th Lessons & Carols worship service: Mike Coss & Sally Morris

...by vacuuming the floors after Christmas and tidying snow piles in the parking lot: Jean & Mike Coss

...by supplying the weekly Ecology Fun Fact: Jean Coss

...everyone who helped to “undeck the halls” after the season of Christmas ended. Special thanks to Karen Reid for spearheading the effort and recruiting worshipers to help after worship January 10th.

...by assisting in various ways with worship: Kevin Basom, Kristin Bedford, Bob Coleman, Mike Coss, John Gibbons, Julie & Pastor Matthew Groenke, Linda Mondry, Karen Reid, David Schiopota, Jane Zarembo

...for setting up all the worship equipment on Saturdays, adjusting it on Sundays, and putting it away on Mondays: Bob Coleman

...for creating signs for the paper recycling bin: Glenn Fasnacht



Rich & Joanne Ciarniello	1-Feb
Ray & Rae Kendrick	3-Feb
Carla & Gary Erbe	9-Feb
Larry & Lynn Jaskiel	25-Feb



Lent begins
Ash Wednesday,
February 17th

February 2021

For the most up-to-date Ctk information, go to What's New? at www.ctktwinsburg.com

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																																							
	<i>1</i> 11:00 AM Staff Mtg	<i>2</i> 10:00 AM Pastors' text study - online 10:30 AM Tuesday AM Ministry 12:00 PM - 6:00 PM Red Cross Blood Drive 7:00 PM Finance Meeting - Zoom	<i>3</i> 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM Bible Study - Zoom	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i> Go to Ctk Twinsburg channel of YouTube.com for worship																																																																																																							
Unpredictable office hours - Wendy may have to report for jury duty																																																																																																													
<i>7</i> 9:30AM Outdoor Worship with Communion 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM 7th-12th Grade Class - Zoom 4:00 PM Free Community Meal - Good Shepherd Christian Go to Ctk Twinsburg channel of YouTube.com for worship	<i>8</i> 11:00 AM Staff Mtg 7:00 PM Council - Zoom	<i>9</i> 10:00 AM Pastors' text study - online 10:30 AM Tuesday AM Ministry 7:00 PM ITSC - offices	<i>10</i> 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM Bible Study - Zoom 1:30 PM SynodWorship Planning - online	<i>11</i> 10:00 AM Cleveland East - online	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i> Go to Ctk Twinsburg channel of YouTube.com for worship																																																																																																							
<i>14</i> 9:30AM Outdoor Worship with Communion 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM 7th-12th Grade Class - Zoom 4:00 PM Free Community Meal - Faith United Methodist Go to Ctk Twinsburg channel of YouTube.com for worship Transfiguration	<i>15</i> 11:00 AM Staff Mtg	<i>16</i> 10:00 AM Pastors' text study - online 10:00AM - 4:00 PM Red Cross Blood Drive 10:30 AM Tuesday AM Ministry	<i>17</i> 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM Bible Study - Zoom 7:00 PM Ash Wednesday Drive-in/Worship with Holy Communion Ash Wednesday See worship on Ctk Twinsburg channel of YouTube	<i>18</i> Newsletter deadline	<i>19</i>	<i>20</i> Go to Ctk Twinsburg channel of YouTube.com for worship																																																																																																							
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<i>28</i> 9:30AM Outdoor Worship with Communion 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM 7th-12th Grade Class - Zoom 4:00 PM Free Community Meal - 1st Congregational (UCC) Go to Ctk Twinsburg channel of YouTube.com for worship Lent 2	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="7">Jan 2021</th> </tr> <tr> <th>S</th><th>M</th><th>T</th><th>W</th><th>T</th><th>F</th><th>S</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>1</td><td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>8</td><td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10</td><td>11</td><td>12</td><td>13</td><td>14</td><td>15</td><td>16</td> </tr> <tr> <td>17</td><td>18</td><td>19</td><td>20</td><td>21</td><td>22</td><td>23</td> </tr> <tr> <td>24</td><td>25</td><td>26</td><td>27</td><td>28</td><td>29</td><td>30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>31</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Jan 2021							S	M	T	W	T	F	S						1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31							<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="7">Mar 2021</th> </tr> <tr> <th>S</th><th>M</th><th>T</th><th>W</th><th>T</th><th>F</th><th>S</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td><td></td><td></td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>8</td><td>9</td><td>10</td><td>11</td> </tr> <tr> <td>12</td><td>13</td><td>14</td><td>15</td><td>16</td><td>17</td><td>18</td> </tr> <tr> <td>19</td><td>20</td><td>21</td><td>22</td><td>23</td><td>24</td><td>25</td> </tr> <tr> <td>26</td><td>27</td><td>28</td><td>29</td><td>30</td><td>31</td><td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Mar 2021							S	M	T	W	T	F	S				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
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Connected, generous, free to serve

By Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop of the ELCA

Dear church,

We have been living with this pandemic for nearly a year. So much has changed. Bubbles, personal protective equipment, social distancing and one-way grocery aisles are part of our lexicon and everyday experience. Who knew, a year ago, that face masks would be advertised as ideal stocking stuffers? Our homes have become offices, schools and gyms. Our commutes have been cut down from hours of traffic to walking over to the dining room table. I do not look forward to the weekly summary from my iPhone that tells me how many hours a day I am staring at a screen.

But the pandemic has also revealed the remarkable resilience and creativity of this church. Within weeks of shelter-in-place restrictions, thousands of our congregations converted to online worship, Bible studies and coffee hours. As the economy stuttered and people lost jobs, you stepped up the work of your food pantries. When kids needed internet access to go to virtual school, you became neighborhood hot spots.

We became more connected. And the gospel was heard by people who, in the “Before Times,” would never have come to church. There is a story about the devil bragging to a pastor, saying that the pandemic was the devil’s tool to close all the churches—to which the pastor replied, “We have opened a church in every home.”

You have been generous. In March and April we began to hear concern from our bishops about synod ministries. What would happen to camps and campus ministries? What would happen to congregations that were anchors in communities and were already stressed before the pandemic? We offered Daily Bread grants—\$500 from the churchwide organization/\$500 from the local congregation. We hoped that 50 congregations might be able to raise the matching funds. So far 374 grants have been awarded. Working with synod bishops we launched the COVID-19 Appeal, which is designed to support key ministries in synods. You stepped up and in eight months have given over \$1.7 million. These grants have been distributed to ministries in 62 of our 65 synods.

Now it’s 2021. The pandemic is still with us. Yes, there are vaccines and distribution is being sorted out. There is an end in sight. But now is not the time to let down our guard. We’ll keep washing our hands, wearing masks and avoiding crowds. We will do this for ourselves and for each other. We will respect the disease and give thanks to God for the gift of science. And we will continue to worship, pray and serve.

The pandemic has also taught us something about ourselves. Though we are physically distant, we are connected. Paul put it this way in a letter to the Corinthians: “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:26-27).

It is our joyful duty to care for one another, particularly the most vulnerable. It is an act of faithfulness when we limit ourselves so that the pandemic is brought to heel. It is an act of love when we restrict our travel or wear a mask. As Martin Luther pointed out in *The Freedom of a Christian*, it is the freedom we have in Christ that makes us servants of all.

There is a model of such self-giving, self-limiting love. “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:4-8).

I pray that we all live in such freedom.

Peace. Be well.

Liz



The road to redemption

ELCA pastor's journey began in prison

By Jay Saunders



Courtesy of A&E Networks

In the span of less than a decade, Erich Kussman went from prison to Princeton Theological Seminary to serving as pastor of St. Bartholomew Church in Trenton, N.J.

From prison to Princeton to the pulpit.

That is the road less traveled taken by Erich Kussman, pastor of St. Bartholomew Lutheran Church in Trenton, N.J.

It was on that road that Kussman found God, found the man he calls his father, and found himself featured on the A&E network series *The Redeemed*.

“God uses the foolish things in this world to make the wise,” he said. “I’m the fool. If you look at this story as a whole, you’d probably say it doesn’t make sense.”

For Kussman, the story began in Plainfield, N.J. Growing up, he didn’t know his father, and his mother was addicted to drugs. He and his siblings found themselves breaking into homes to steal food.

“We were hustling and bustling just to get by,” he said. “Living the street life was my world. It was what I knew.”

That life led to Kussman selling drugs. One night in 2002, he found himself on a drug deal that turned into a fight. He ultimately stabbed another man with a box cutter, and everyone fled. Two weeks later he was in handcuffs and on his way to jail.

“I wanted him to cut off his yesterdays and focus on his tomorrows.”

Kussman turned down multiple plea deals and faced a long prison sentence. He knew he “wasn’t going anywhere,” he said, but then things started to happen that changed his life—even though he thought his path wasn’t leading him anywhere but inside a jail cell.

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

The cell Kussman occupied in Somerset County jail had been used as a makeshift chapel by the other inmates, who would meet there early in the morning for Bible study. For months, he would ignore the gatherings and go back to sleep. But one day he had what he calls his “God moment,” after hearing Psalm 34:6: “This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble.”

The next day, something exceptionally unusual happened: Kussman was mistakenly released from jail—no explanation, no details. Then, as he stepped outside and walked free, the next domino fell.

“I started walking down the street and saw a man and asked him if he was lost,” Kussman said. “He pointed his finger straight at me and said, ‘No, you’re lost, and you need Jesus.’”

After nearly two days of unearned freedom, Kussman was once again surrounded by police cars and brought back to jail, sentenced to prison for 12 years, with a 10-year minimum. But, having realized something had changed in him, Kussman was ready to learn.

Fighting for others

After being transferred to state prison, Kussman got a job in the chaplain’s office. There he met Emmanuel Bourjolly, a chaplain who worked with inmates and led Bible studies with them. He and Kussman quickly formed a relationship.

“He impressed me every day,” Bourjolly said. “He came to me and asked for my guidance. I wanted him to cut off his yesterdays and focus on his tomorrows.”

And those tomorrows included a promise, of sorts, from Bourjolly to Kussman.

“[Bourjolly] told me I was going to go to the same place he went,” Kussman said. “He meant Princeton Theological Seminary. I had never laughed so hard in my life. I said, ‘Are you nuts, old man?’”

As the years went on behind bars, Kussman continued to work and study with Bourjolly. When Kussman was released into a halfway house, Bourjolly helped him earn his General Educational Development degree and apply to college. Four years later Kussman earned a degree in biblical studies—and got a surprise on graduation day.

“I don’t know how he found me, but that man showed up at my graduation,” he said of Bourjolly. “He said, ‘My son, are you ready?’ The next day I had an interview with Princeton.”

When looking for a home congregation, Kussman joined Holy Cross Lutheran in Springfield, N.J., where he would serve as vicar. Kussman said he found the ELCA congregation to be “the only welcoming church, after visiting a half-dozen beforehand.”

He sees his role in ministry as walking alongside people on their own journeys.

In 2019, Kussman earned a Master of Divinity degree with a Lutheran studies concentration from Princeton. In July of that year, he began his call as acting pastor of St. Bartholomew. In the span of less than a decade, he had gone from a prison cell to pastoring.

“Erich has completely changed,” said Bourjolly, whom Kussman identifies as his father figure. “He is still a fighter, but [now] he is fighting for others.”

At St. Bartholomew, Kussman strives to use all his hard-won life lessons to serve the community. He holds office hours on the sidewalk. He helped create a food pantry that serves nearly 200 families per week and has expanded to a meal distribution program during COVID-19. He sees his role in ministry as walking alongside people on their own journeys.

“This world needs a little love,” he said. “People may see [St. Bartholomew] and it’s the only Christ they see. Everyone needs a meeting spot, but it’s the people inside it who make it real. My dream is for the community to know we’re here.”

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Last year, his story reached more people when he was featured in an episode of A&E's digital-exclusive documentary series *The Redeemed*, on Facebook Watch. The true honor for Kussman, though, came when he was ordained and became an ELCA rostered minister in October. The service was the first time in his life, Kussman said, that he was "speechless."

"It was a fulfillment," he said. "Now let's see what God has for me next."



Jay Saunders has more than 20 years' experience writing for television, newspapers and magazines. He is a member of Fox Point Lutheran Church in Fox Point, Wis.

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My take: We must respond

By Martin Zimmann



Bill Gohl

On Jan. 6, Leila Ortiz, bishop of the D.C. Metro Synod and Bill Gohl, bishop of the Delaware-Maryland Synod, were with Karen Brau, pastor of the city's Luther Place Memorial Church, and other leaders for prayer that was interrupted by chaos at the Capitol.

A few days ago, on Jan. 6, the U.S. Capitol became ground zero of a display of insurrection. When the crowd unlawfully and violently stormed the building, we witnessed sinfulness masquerading as patriotism. When they acted on baseless conspiracy theories under banners that proclaimed, "Jesus Saves" and "Jesus is my Savior, Trump is my President," we witnessed heresy in real time. Some in the crowd carried known signs of white supremacy. It was shocking and painful to behold.

Anne Lamott, in struggling with her own confrontations with evil, writes this: "How—if we are to believe that there is meaning in our brief time here on earth, that mercy is the ground of our being and love is sovereign—do we explain childhood cancer, earthquakes, addiction? Where is mercy in a beloved's suicide? In the Christian tradition, we say that Christ continues to be crucified, in tsunamis, sick children, political prisoners and that we must respond."

As Lamott insists, we must respond. How do we, a denomination that has members from all political parties, faithfully do so?

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Guidelines for speaking truth

As Lutherans, we're intimately familiar with call-and-response.

A worship leader says, "The Lord be with you."

We respond, "*And also with you.*"

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

These words are etched into our collective consciousness. We respond when prompted. So it is with this occasion in our national narrative. We must respond. And the response cannot be of God unless it is couched in words of peace with justice and reconciliation.

The Lord be with you in your response, because only by wishing God's presence into the midst of our dialogue can we bridge the ideological divides that cripple our individual and collective growth in community. It's not enough to simply spout off on Facebook or unfriend anyone who disagrees with your venting. Your response might require calling elected officials. It might call you to have nuanced and loving conversations with relatives whose ideas are markedly different from yours, committing to loving them even if and when they refuse to change their beliefs in the face of real and compelling data.

Lift up your hearts before initiating your response, because the psalmist reminds us every Ash Wednesday that "a broken and contrite heart" will not be despised by God. God is present in brokenness. God can take what little we offer and inspire us to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God. Those of us who identify as white must discern how and when to speak. We must check our own privilege and bias at the door. Most importantly, we must assume the best intentions of our siblings of color, even when they respond in ways that make us uncomfortable (this dis-ease might be the Spirit at work, after all).

Finally, **let us give thanks to the Lord our God**. Only through framing our response as an act of praise will we gain focus and proper intent. If we respond to acts of destruction, violence and hatred with the love of God and neighbor first and foremost, even our mistakes will be better than attempts wrought through our own vainglorious sense of ambition or righteousness. Disavowing our need to be right to be in relationship is easier when we strive to see people as God sees them. This is so difficult because it subverts everything we assume about piety and righteousness. Yes, people must be held accountable for their actions, but no one is beyond God's grace.

We must respond, people of faith. We must respond to this and other violent actions by faithfully engaging with our neighbors in a way that signals peace, tempered by accountability and wisdom to discover the truth. May God be with us—and also with our neighbors—as we seek to serve in these extraordinary times.



The Rev. Dr. Martin Otto Zimmann is an adjunct professor of church and society at United Lutheran Seminary, Gettysburg campus. He holds a Ph.D. in American culture studies.

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FEBRUARY MESSENGER 2021

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Midweek Lenten Devotions *Created for Community*



February 24th - **In Community with Creation**

March 3rd - **In Community with All the Saints**

March 10th - **In Community with Our Neighbor**

March 17th - **In Community with Those on the Margins**

March 24th - **In Community with Christ**

Lent begins February 17th



7:00 PM Ash Wednesday Drive-in Worship with Holy Communion

Christ the King welcomes you to our worship, fellowship, and service!

Sunday Drive-In Worship w/Communion.....9:30 AM

Worship with us from home weekly at the CtK Twinsburg
channel of YouTube:

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/
UC0DyPtpgvHWrYdrFgWQso5A](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0DyPtpgvHWrYdrFgWQso5A)

Midweek Lenten Devotions will be online. Watch for
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