

Central Coast Conference

Greetings to our fellow ELCA congregations of Southwest CA:

With smoke, fire, pandemic, and a reckoning on race and racism in America, the **Central Coast Conference** continues to persevere in its care of its communities and love of God. While many of us leaders were bracing ourselves to hold our congregations through an election season, none of us expected to be reinventing church. But our core practices of faith remain intact -- gathering in virtual spaces and safe places, mutual prayer, dwelling with the Word, accompaniment with many different kinds of journeys, and advocacy for the most vulnerable and underserved. Everything has changed. And yet, the more we look to history and the struggles of the saints before us, the more we dwell on those first churches who left centralized worship in the temple, we see ourselves mirrored in the pages of the Bible. May our crucifixions, imprisonments, and shipwrecks be transformed for the glory of God and the life of God's people.

Bethel Lutheran Church -- Templeton

With the gifts of our members, we were very quickly able to move our worship online and it has provided meaningful connection. Phone trees, online small groups, in-person youth group, and virtual coffee hour have secured new friendships and deepened established relationships. Our North County Womenade project, an interfaith coalition distributing cash assistance to local residents, will supply by the end of 2020 over \$100,000 to local residents for immediate needs like rent and gas and health care costs and more. This included securing an \$80,000 grant from the Immigrant Resilience Fund for undocumented residents of our region. The little things continue to matter too: every night after going out to our jobs and checking in on friends and family, we ring the bell at 8pm to honor the nearby hospital and remind the neighborhood God is here.

Hope Lutheran Church -- Atascadero

In June, Hope said good-bye to Pastors Liz and Ryan Radtke as they moved to a new call in Virginia. It was not how they wanted to celebrate those seven years, but they made the best of a drive-thru parade and had quite a send-off. Soon after Pr. Russ Gordon arrived to shepherd yet another congregation through the interim period. This summer, they have provided online worship and begun gathering outdoors for informal socializing as well as Sunday morning worship. They continue to be an essential partner to the local homeless shelter and meal program. With strong council leadership and a deep desire to serve, they look ahead to their next chapter.

Calvary Lutheran Church -- Morro Bay

Rev. Robyn Provis writes, "We are eight weeks into a new interim and doing very well after the retirement of Rev. Jim Berg who served here for 29 years. They report feeling excited and empowered... and are enjoying finding out there is more than setting three for worship LOL. I've been holding patio chair visits (Grace with space) in order to meet everyone. We continue to offer programming to stay connected such as ZOOM bible study and ZOOM Fellowship Friday social hour. A HUGE 6 foot by 12 foot banner is going up on the building tomorrow. People are enjoying going through the MET (Ministry Exploration Team) process with Pastor Marj and are getting ready to start interviews. In addition the council has divided up the members into "caring caller" lists so that council can keep in touch with individual members and families. Attendance for virtual worship is strong and people are faithfully sending in their tithes and offerings. So far, so good up here on the North Coast."

Mt. Carmel Lutheran Church -- San Luis Obispo

Despite the challenge of the COVID-19 virus, Mt. Carmel Lutheran Church in San Luis Obispo has continued to be an active community of worship, spiritual nurture and service to the community. We presently have two weekly Zoom online gatherings for worship— Sunday morning and Wednesday Evening Prayer; the latter has recently been adapted to include a small outdoor, physically-distanced setting. In addition, Sunday Adult Education has continued together with two weekly Bible study groups and an ongoing book discussion group. Our CAT (Children and Teen) Ministry has continued to offer online activities for kids and youth and we have some outdoor, in-person gatherings scheduled for the coming weeks. Our various Ministry Teams have continued to meet regularly via Zoom and in the past months we have done fundraising projects for Iglesia Santa Cruz and the SLO Food Bank, and hosted two blood drives. We have worked to expand our connections with members through a twice-weekly internet newsletter and a Telephone Tree. Although we long to gather together physically and there is concern about when we will be able to do so, we continue to be the Church led by God's Spirit who calls, gathers and enlightens us.

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church -- Orcutt

This neighborhood church also continues to worship primarily online and gather for Zoom fellowship hours and Bible study. In the midst of all the crisis adjustments, they continue to walk with people through the common transitions of illness and death, rites of passage, and preparing for new schooling experiences. They work closely with Iglesia Luterana de Santa Cruz offering vital supplies, hands-on assistance with feeding programs, and friendship through these difficult days.

Iglesia Luterana de Santa Cruz -- Santa Maria

Pastor Esteban Salazar with his wife Angelica continue to faithfully serve and bless their tri-lingual community. They hold worship online every Sunday. With economic disruption, they bring food to members at home and listen with care to people's struggles. And once a week, they continue their Feed my People Thursday tradition when they head to the fields with hundreds of sandwiches and words of prayer. Their ministry remains a powerful presence in Santa Maria.

Bethania Lutheran Church -- Solvang

At the start of the shut down Bethania moved strictly to virtual worship on YouTube. We are currently working on moving to an outdoor service that will follow guidelines and have a recorded option available for those who can't/don't want to gather in person. The big ministry we've centered ourselves on during the pandemic is an emergency food distribution, which is in it's 23rd week and feeding on average 1,400 people a week. We have also begun the process of converting part of our space into a food pantry, which should be ready in about 2 or 3 weeks.

And while not a geographical home to the **Finnish Lutheran Ministry of the ELCA**, we are a home to the leader, Rev. Jarmo Tarkki. The Finnish Lutheran Ministry is an 11 point ministry, serving Finnish communities west of the Mississippi and Mexico. Pr. Jarmo writes, "We have not had in person services since last February. Instead, we have live Zoom -worship services. We also have three separate confirmation classes, 15 students in three different locations (Dallas, Silicon Valley and San Diego), all via Zoom at this time. Currently we have three pastors, three musicians and a 1/3 time administrative assistant. I am the only full time employee."



Foothill Conference

Southwest California Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
1700 Foothill Blvd
La Canada, California 91011
818-790-1951

Reverend Scott C. Peterson. – Dean

2019/2020 was a year of less transition in the Foothill Conference of our beloved Synod. Here is a brief rundown of some of the leadership and other changes (as on 04/09/2020):

- Pastor Zach Johnson has been called to Hill Avenue Grace, Pasadena
- The rest of the Conference has entered into a time of stability

Anita Stoker concluded her year of service to the Conference as Chair, as her and her spouse have moved to Minnesota, and Susan Johnson was elected to that role. Additionally, Pr. Deborah Andersen continued her service as Secretary/Treasurer. Deborah continued to encourage congregations to remember their commitment of minimal dues payments to further the work of the Conference.

Meetings of the Conference were graciously hosted by the Synod Office as were the regular meetings of the Collegium. The Conference wishes to express its great gratitude to the Synod Staff for their hospitality and helpfulness.

As Dean, I am yet again grateful for all of the Rostered Leaders who serve the congregations of the Conference and I ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen each one of them as well as those Rostered Leaders within the Conference who are currently without call or who are retired. Moreover, I know that I, and all of our Rostered Leaders, give God thanks for the lay leaders within each of our congregations who steadfastly rejoice in doing God's Work with (Their) Hands as together we seek to Make Christ Known in the Foothills and beyond.

As we continue in this time of COVID-19 and an unknown future, we take solace in God's presence and the Body of Christ lived out through our lives as God's people. May we be held in grace, hope, and love.

INJ,

The Rev. Scott C. Peterson – Dean

South Bay Conference Report 2020

These past 9 months have provided churches in the South Bay and other conferences with countless challenges and opportunities for ministry. As the old saying goes, when someone gives you lemons are you going to make lemonade? In observing the ministry that has been transpiring since the outbreak of Covid-19, congregations in the South Bay have been making a lot of lemonade. Covid-19 has enabled many of the varied ministries to be transformed by social media, video platforms and communication channels that they may not have voluntarily explored prior to the pandemic. Though we have faced new challenges to our ministry and put in countless hours attempting to keep up with the demand, I believe that all of our ministries will be bolstered by the use of these technologies as well serve as a transformational backdrop to how we as the church will do ministry in the years to come.

Below is a breakdown of what technologies the churches are using to proclaim the Gospel message to their congregants and friends of their ministries:

South Bay Conference Churches:

First Lutheran, Torrance: Zoom & Outdoor

Glory Lutheran, Torrance: Zoom

Christ the King, Torrance: Zoom

Living Spirit, Torrance: Email

First Lutheran, Carson: Facebook

Pueblo de Dios, Compton: Zoom

Trinity Lutheran, Manhattan Beach: Zoom-Go to Meeting/Outdoor

Trinity Lutheran, Hawthorne: Youtube Channel

St. Paul's Lutheran, Rancho Palos Verdes: Zoom

Resurrection Lutheran, Redondo Beach: Zoom/Outdoor

Olivet Lutheran, Hawthorne: Facebook

St. John's Lutheran, Gardena: Zoom/Outdoor

Good Shepherd Lutheran, San Pedro: Zoom/Outdoor

Respectfully,

Rev. Dr. Christopher Lindstrom, Good Shepherd
South Bay Dean

Tehachapi Conference

Church Together:

The Tehachapi Conference encompasses Kern County and North East Los Angeles. The conference includes four congregations and El Camino Pines Lutheran Camp:

- **Lutheran Church of the Master**, Lancaster – Pastor Jeffrey Berg
- **St. Stephen Lutheran**, Palmdale – Pastor Christopher Hogstad & Deacon Megan Hogstad
- **Redeemer Lutheran**, Bakersfield – Pastor Jon Christenson
- **El Camino Pines LRCC**, Pine Mountain – Meredith Smith
- **Emmanuel Lutheran**, Bakersfield – Pastor Dawn Wilder, Conference Dean

Conference Highlights:

Redeemer Lutheran: Like every other congregation in the synod, Redeemer has been hit hard by this pandemic. Currently, in addition to online worship, we are also holding outdoor worship early in the morning. The good news is that we have been in contact with each other via telephone shepherds and Bible study attendance is actually up. We are taking advantage of technology and mail to continue Sunday School and we post frequently on social media to reach members and our community.

"O Trinity of love and pow'r,
Your children shield in danger's hour;
From rock and tempest, fire, and foe,
Protect them where-so-e'er they go...

Lutheran Church of the Master: Lutheran Church of the Master in Lancaster is a great group of people who are trying to find different ways to be the Church of Christ in the midst of pandemic. We are streaming worship every Sunday morning on Face Book and You Tube, boosting the posts in the hopes that we will reach more of our neighbors. We continue to live out our passion to help our diverse, low income neighborhood. We give out food from our pantry, we participate in Crop Walk for Hunger. And most exciting we will soon be doing a drive through food give away. We have sources to provide about 50 pounds of food per household in need hoping to give to 100 families each month.

"The churches in the conference continue to reach out to local neighborhoods, offering food ministries, Vacation Bible School, and other services impacting local children.

Respectfully Submitted by the Rev. Dawn Wilder,
Conference Dean

Twin Valleys Conference Report, 2019-2020

The Twin Valleys Conference of the Southwest California Synod of the ELCA includes 15 congregations spread through the San Fernando and Santa Clarita Valleys, 14 of which lead and collaborate in shared ministries. Our congregations are varied in size, cultures, ministries, worship languages (ASL, English, Spanish), forms of worship, and contexts: more suburban congregations feature nurturing preschools and youth ministries; urban and other congregations lead poverty ministries and outreach to immigrant communities. We are home to dual Latinx and Anglo congregations such as Faith—Canoga Park (Pr. Cesar Arroyo) and Central—Van Nuys (Pr. Marsha Harris). And our conference models the only example of a two-point parish in our synod: St. Andrew's—Van Nuys and Prince of Peace—Northridge (Pr. Chuck Bunnell).

Living Lutheran, the magazine of the ELCA, featured the work of some of the Twin Valleys Conference congregations and pastoral leaders this year. The April 2020 is celebrated Pr. Marsha Harris' impactful outreach at Central Lutheran/Iglesia Luterana Central—Van Nuys to its Latinx community and people in poverty. (<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2020/04/open-doors/>) In the January 2020 issue in the article "Being Jesus," St. Matthew's Lutheran Church—NoHo shared its inclusive vision of the Gospel and work addressing homelessness through its non-profit NoHo Home Alliance. (<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2020/01/being-jesus/>) Pr. Brian Hiortdahl of Shepherd of the Valley regularly offers his profound pastoral insight and beautiful writing in essays in *The Living Lutheran*. (<https://www.livinglutheran.org/?s=hiortdahl>)

The one of the significant developments within the Twin Valleys Conference in the 2019-2020 reporting year is the approval, on June 8, 2019, of the formation of the Twin Valleys Lutheran Parish. The TVLP was established as a separate non-profit religious corporation of the State of California that has as its primary purpose to foster and oversee collaborative ministries by its member congregations. In the formation process, the TVLP identified 4 primary areas for collaborative ministries: exploring creative, Gospel-filled ways to address congregational sustainability; building out our shared youth and young adult ministries; expanding Latinx ministries in our territory; and developing collaborative ministries addressing poverty and homelessness.

In the Fall of 2020, a board of the TVLP was established and tasked with developing the necessary founding documents for the parish, agreements with its member congregations, developing the necessary administrative infrastructure for the transparent and efficient functioning of the parish, and filing for federal tax exempt status as a 501 (c)(3).

Then in March, the Covid-19 pandemic hit. And like many other synod conferences and communities, the Twin Valleys Conference needed to adapt. From March 2020 until August 2020, our focus has been on providing prayerful support for colleagues and congregations as we all navigated the move to on-line worship utilizing a range of technologies. No longer able to meet monthly in person as a collegium, rostered leaders of the TVLP were invited to gather

every other Thursday on Zoom to share ideas for best practices and prayers on the journey to being church and being church together in new, socially distanced ways.

As the TV conference navigated the new pandemic-defined reality, we discovered many strengths in our midst. For example, we learned just how resilient our congregations and our faithful people are. Some congregations became aware that they actually had a greater capacity for change and adaptation than we might have given them credit for before the pandemic. And we discovered new ways to collaborate—even if our ambitious plans for the Twin Valleys Lutheran Parish were temporarily put on hold. We learned how to do collaborative confirmation class on Zoom, finishing out the year with meaningful sessions focusing fostering our confirmands relationships with God and our confirmation community. And, because of the rising need for food among people in poverty in the San Fernando and Santa Clarita Valleys, we began monthly collaborative “contactless” food drives at different congregations to support the three food pantries in our territory: LSS in North Hollywood, Central Lutheran in Van Nuys, and The Church of Hope in Canyon Country.

The killing of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis unleashed the start of reckoning with systemic racism in our nation and the institutions in our country, including the ELCA and in some of the ELCA churches in the Twin Valleys Conference. For example, St. Luke—Woodland Hills and Bethlehem—Granada Hills undertook a study of Lutheran pastor Lenny Duncan’s *Dear Church*. St. Matthew’s—NoHo engaged in a 21-day racial equity challenge in which participants undertook daily study, reflection and anti-racist actions. Several leaders and church members are participating in a synod-wide reflection and implementation of the ELCA’s recent statement “How Strategic and Authentic is Our Diversity: A Call for Confession, Reflection and Healing Action.” These are only first steps toward a long-term commitment to ending racism in the church and our communities.

During this year the Twin Valleys Conference did experience several pastoral transitions. We bid farewell to Pr. Steve Jerbi from Bethel-Encino in Fall 2019 and Pr. Ioan Ittu from Bethlehem—Granada Hills in July 2020. We rejoiced with Pr. Ralph Midtlying’s on his retirement from All Saints--Sun Valley in December 2019. We mourned the death in April 2020 of our beloved colleague, Pr. George McLeary, who served as the innovative pastor of The Church of Hope—Canyon Country. And we of course bid farewell to Bishop Guy Erwin and his husband Rob Flynn, members of St. Luke—Woodland Hills, as Bishop Guy answered the call to lead United Lutheran Seminary.

Pr. Marc Mohr, well known to our conference for his service here as vicar, accepted the call as pastor to Church of the Foothills, Sylmar. We welcomed interim pastoral leaders Pr. Kenneth Davis at Bethel--Encino, and Pr. Kenny Bowen at All Saints—Sun Valley. We have also celebrated the arrival of our new colleague, Pr. Jeff Kallevig, who has accepted the call as senior pastor at Emmanuel—North Hollywood.

Six months into the Covid-19 pandemic, the Twin Valleys Conference has lived into this new way of being church together and we are resuming work on our broader collaborative vision.

St. Luke—Woodland Hills and Shepherd of the Valley—West Hills organized a joint Zoom Vacation Bible School. Our shared confirmation program will start up again in October. And a dedicated ban of lay leaders from Shepherd of the Valley together with the board of the Twin Valleys Lutheran Parish will be advancing the formation of the parish.

We look forward to continuing to witness together to the grace, love and justice of God revealed in Jesus Christ in the year to come.

In Christ's service,
Rev. Stephanie Jaeger, Dean, Twin Valleys Conference
Pastor, St. Matthew's Lutheran Church—NoHo

Current Congregations of the Twin Valleys
Conference:

1. American, Burbank
2. Faith, Canoga Park
3. The Church of Hope (TCOH), Canyon
County
4. Bethel, Encino
5. Bethlehem, Granada Hills
6. Emmanuel, North Hollywood
7. St. Matthews, North Hollywood
8. LIFEhouse/First, Northridge
9. Prince of Peace, Northridge
10. All Saints, Sun Valley
11. Church of the Foothills, Sylmar
12. Central, Van Nuys
13. St. Andrew's, Van Nuys
14. Shepherd of the Valley, West Hills
15. St. Luke, Woodland Hills