

Living Lutheran-Magazine

United in Baptism



From the Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton

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There is an Irish saying: “It is in the shelter of each other that the people live.”

I am writing this at the end of March. I don’t know what the world will look like when you read this at the beginning of May. [COVID-19](#) has the world sheltering-in-place. We’ve learned new concepts such as “social distancing” and “flatten the curve.” We have stopped physical contact—no handshakes, hugs or high fives. We even wear gloves. It is a strange new world we live in.

There is fear in this new world. Over a million people have been infected and thousands have died. We can’t see the virus. We don’t know where or when it will strike next. Our lives have been disrupted—restricted travel and closed churches, schools, businesses, parks and stores. Health care workers, those dedicated to healing, find themselves as soldiers on the front line. Pray and give thanks for them.

In this highly anxious time, some—individuals, communities and countries—are seeking safety and certainty by stockpiling as many provisions as they can and walling off others. Barricaded behind rolls of toilet paper and Clorox wipes, fortified with generators and Spam, some will try to wait this out by themselves. There has been a spike in sales of firearms and alcohol. Not a good combination. Taking precautions is wise. Believing that it is possible to isolate and cut off from neighbors and nations so that one will never be touched either by the virus or the fallout of this pandemic is unreasonable.

For me, one of the cruelest effects of this pandemic is that we cannot gather. Our natural inclination in a time of crisis is to draw together, hold on to each other, support each other. Life passages, births, birthdays, weddings, baptisms, funerals, holy days, holidays, will be remembered as times of isolation and absence.

In Christ, we are knit into one body. And just as surely as Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one—this wildly mysterious community of the Trinity—so are we one.

And yet, in the deepest, truest sense, we are connected to one another. In baptism we are united with Christ and are members one of another. [Baptism](#) makes a difference and makes us different. We are no longer lone travelers making our way through this life. We don't have to go it alone. In fact, we cannot, because, in Christ, we are knit into one body. And just as surely as Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one—this wildly mysterious community of the Trinity—so are we one.

Jesus clearly stated this and daily fulfills this promise: “My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one” (John 10:27-30).

Baptism makes us different. The immutable gracious truth that we are God's makes it possible for us to feel the connection with each other, even, and especially, when we are separated. This is a great paradox—the more we are separated from each other, the deeper our connection to each other becomes. I find myself thinking about family and friends more often now that we can't be physically together.

And here is another paradox—when we are alone, when “the evening comes and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work is done” ([Evangelical Lutheran Worship](#), page 325), then, in the stillness and solitude, we feel the presence of God.

When life gets back to “normal,” I pray that I do not slip back into casual encounters with people and God. We can't think of ourselves as islands. Because we belong to God, we belong to each other.

The author of Hebrews puts it this way: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).