

Nativity News

Volume 74, Issue 5

May 2020

“CHURCH
IS WHO WE ARE
NOT WHERE WE GO”

Those who grew up attending Sunday School likely remember the hand-play where we locked our fingers together, facing down, put our index fingers together, pointing up, and brought our thumbs together. Together we recited, “Here’s the church, here’s the steeple, open the door, and see all the people.” Then we wiggled

our fingers and giggled. We learned, from an early age, that church is the people.

This pandemic is reminding us in a powerful way that “*Church is who we are not where we go.*” Our typically bustling building is very quiet these days, almost eerie. The one exception is when we host the **Red Cross Blood Drives** — two are scheduled for Saturdays, May 2nd and 16th. Maybe you want to sign up to donate? They cannot accommodate walk-ins.

Church of the Nativity, however, is anything but quiet. You’ll see in this newsletter that lots of ministry is happening outside of our building — virtual Sunday School, Youth Meetings, Council Meetings, even Choir Rehearsals. People are connecting on-line for worship. Can you believe that we had 124 people connect on Holy Thursday, 173 for Good Friday, and 288 on Easter Sunday? And this doesn’t account for multiple people watching! I’m certain that in my 38 years of ministry, I’ve never had 173+ people attend a Good Friday service! We also have people from various parts of the country tuning in — some are former members, others are connecting because someone from Nativity shared the link! Our mission to be a “*Welcoming, Nurturing, Empowering* community of faith carrying Christ’s love, justice, and peace into our community and world” is very much alive.

Furthermore, what I’ve listed is just some of the ministry Church of the Nativity is accomplishing every day. Some of our young people are serving as grocery clerks/stockers and fast-food servers. Members and friends are working in hospitals and doctor’s offices. We have paid and volunteer first responders, bankers and IT specialists. Still others are teachers connecting in new ways with their students. Parents are learning to home school (except for new math—nobody understands that!). People are delivering meals to those who can’t risk going to the grocery store and several folks are making masks to be given away. All are praying! The list could go on and on but you get the point: “*Church is who we are not where we go!*”

**Thank you, Nativity, for being Church!
Christ is Risen and Alive — living in and through you!**

Peace,
Pastor Ruth Snyder

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*Our mission is to be a
**Welcoming, Nurturing,
Empowering** community of
faith carrying Christ’s love,
justice & peace into our
community & world.*

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Dear Nativity Friends,
As I look back at last month's *Nativity News*, I marvel at all the plans that were scheduled for the Easter season and beyond. It's now hard to believe that most of those plans were not allowed to happen.

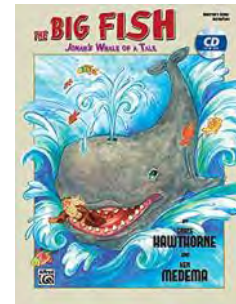
As we were all told to stay home and to practice social distancing, a new normal had begun. We now had only our homes and our families to shelter in place with. There was only one lifeline; the internet. How was this going to allow us to see and worship with our Nativity family on Sundays? What about fellowship? What about the music? (The dictionary defines 'Harmony' as two or more notes sounding together.) How was this going to happen when gathering was becoming more and more limited every day? After some brainstorming it was decided that we would move forward by pre-recording a mini-Sunday service each week. This would then be available for folks to watch on-line when they could.

Because music is such an important part of the service, an all-call went out to the Chancel Choir and Praise Team for volunteers to be soloists for these services. We had many answer the call. So far we have had Sharon Schlegel, Steve Copps, Chrissy DeMart, Praise Team Director Sean Irawan, Mark Kloss and Aaron Mason share their musical talents with us for our on-line services.

Also part of the new normal has been the increased usage of apps like 'FaceTime,' and the new way to gather together, the 'Zoom Meeting.' Pastor Ruth got us set up early on so that we could take ad-

vantage of these opportunities. The Chancel Choir continues to Zoom meet every other Thursday evening. These meetings allow us the chance to check-in with each other. So much is changing every day. We have shared updated church news and events, personal situations and needs and a fair share of good news and laughter. (See photo on page 10.)

The Youth Choir has also had several Zoom meetings. This, too, was a great way to check-in with the kids about doing school work at home, coping with siblings, and of course, boredom. We experimented with having a virtual rehearsal together. Since the kids already had copies of the cantata at home it made sense to give it a try. We tried some echoing singing warm-ups. I sang a short phrase and they all sang back what they heard. There is a slight delay when something is said and when it's actually heard. This was a bit challenging but we managed. So off we went practicing "The Big Fish - Jonah's Whale of a Tale." The plan is to keep working on the piece in the hopes that we may get to perform it for the congregation in the near future.



This is the part of the newsletter where I usually list the rehearsal times for all the choirs. Obviously at this time we are not in the regular rehearsal mode. I would encourage you all to Google the very inspirational song, "You'll Never Walk Alone." I hope this will help get you through these trying days.

Blessings to all,

Mike Copps, Music Director

**ANNUAL
FLOWER
SALE
CANCELLED**

The Church Council voted on April 15 to cancel the Annual Spring Flower Sale for this year since there is no way to ensure proper social distancing during the truck unloading, flower sorting & order pickup. We'll try again next year!

**NATIVITY
GARAGE SALE
Postponed**

We hope to reschedule the Garage Sale for later in the year. Please continue to collect your treasures and keep them at home for now. We will let you know when a new date is determined.

Hi all,

Starting from early April, we're adding a new program that involves everyone in our Praise Team. It's a group improvement program, where all the team members are challenged to actively learn one new knowledge at a time and try to enrich our technical abilities.

Beside the fact that God wants us to use and nurture the talents that are trusted to us, we're also hoping that this project will help us to improve our individual confidence level that eventually leads to a more solid unity when we're gathered as a team.

It is our understanding that, the less technical obstacles we have as a team, the more freedom there is for us to express our gratitude and love to God through our praise and worship.

On the other hand, as much as we're all excited to get this program up and running, this social distancing rule has been our number one and most difficult challenge to overcome.

We have been trying to do everything virtually, and so far, it has been very time-consuming and ineffective. However, we're still thankful that at the very least, we still have a platform to talk "face to face."

In addition, I also want to give a big shout out to our Praise Team members for their proactiveness and their willingness to grow together as a team, despite

all these unpleasant situations that affect all of us. I'm so proud to see how everyone respects and loves each other, their connections are genuine and very contagious.



As a newbie myself, I can assure you how welcoming everyone is, and it has been such a nice feeling to witness and be a part of a team that feels more like a family. Therefore, I want to use this opportunity to open the door into our team even wider and invite all of you who want to join us. Whether you're a singer, instrumentalist, or even if you're not sure yet what you can do to be a more active member of our church; feel free to write me your name and contact information via email. Then as a team, we will do our best to find a spot where you may fit in.

(Keep in mind that this will be more effective as soon as we can return and gather in our church building.)

Please stay safe and healthy,

Sean Irawan, Praise Team Director
(917) 601-5501 | sean@nativityucc.org



Hi Everyone,

I'm keeping busy working mostly from home & handling many of the tasks I normally do at the church office. I monitor the church phone so I'm still only a call away & I send/answer emails as always. Twice a week I pick up Nativity's mail at the post office & then go to church to open & distribute the envelopes to staff mailboxes & volunteer folders. Each time I am amazed to see the number of envelopes from Nativity members & friends which contain pledge payments, Deacons' Fund contributions & other offerings. Sometimes, people even include encouraging notes for Pastor Ruth and/or me. It warms my heart to see your faithfulness & love for your church & church family shine through even in these trying times!

Each Friday, I mail a paper version of our weekly email update to those who don't have email



addresses in our database. When I have extra time, I work on reorganizing the office files (paper & electronic) which I normally only have time to do in the summer. This has been an ongoing project for the last few years & it feels good to make some real progress on it.

Once a week we have a Zoom staff meeting during which Pastor Ruth, Mike Copps, Carissa Gigliotti, Sean Irawan (welcome to Nativity, Sean!) and I are able

to share how everyone is doing personally & what ministry we are accomplishing. We also plan for what's next. It's always good to see everyone's faces when we can't be together in person.

I'm sending my prayers & best wishes for health & safety to all of the Nativity family! I miss you!

Sandy Mathisen, Office Manager

Youth & Family Ministry



I have to start by saying how thankful I am for the dedication of our Christian education team who continue to let our children and youth know we love and care about them. Everyone is learning new ways of being the church and adapting to the current needs of our families. I love and appreciate all our volunteers *all the time*, but it is times like these that I remember why!

Our Senior High Youth Group continues to meet every week via Zoom for about an hour to check in and chat. This past week, some of our recent graduates joined in. It was great to see them and hear about how they have been transitioning to doing college classes at home and what is happening with their families and jobs.

You may not all know this, but many of our high schoolers and young adults are essential workers who are keeping our community afloat on the “front lines” right now. They work in grocery stores, pizza places, pharmacies, etc. I’m sure you’ve seen some loving gestures offered during these past weeks to people in these roles, as they have, but it sounds like they have also seen more than their fair share of unloving behavior. If any of us ever has a moment where we feel like being unkind to our essential workers, let’s try to remember the faces of our own Nativity youth/young adults and spread the love of Christ instead. If we can afford a little extra tip, we might want to give it, especially with “no contact” deliveries. Since our smiles can’t be seen behind masks, we can thank the cashier for being there with words or extra diligence to keep them safe. I bet it would mean a lot more to those who are working tired and often frustrated than it costs us to do.



As for me, personally, I have been learning a lot about myself during this pandemic. I remembered how much I love teaching Sunday School and have enjoyed thinking of fun ways to share the stories for the week to all the different age groups on Class Dojo. I am grateful to have the chance to do a Children’s Time each week during our mini worship service even though being on camera so often is still a stretch for me.

Children's
Time



I have also had to re-evaluate what “helping” our families looks like right now. I have slowly learned that not every family wants or needs more connection right now. Some parents are overwhelmed working from home and helping their own kids with school and some kids are overwhelmed from too much virtual school. Others are missing Sunday School and church and are enjoying and thriving in our online environment. In all honesty, especially at the beginning of this, I struggled with not feeling disappointed or like I was failing because I did not have 100% or sometimes even 50% participation. But what I started to hear (really hear) from our parents was that some families just need a little space right now. They feel supported and their kids feel loved by their families and by us whether they are commenting and posting or not. I think this dose of reality (and humility) will continue to make me better at my ministry to our families when we are worshipping in the building again. I am realizing that the same ebb and flow of participation will always be with us.

One big lesson I am learning and hope to remind myself and others is that lack of attendance/participation more often than not has nothing to do with interest or desire. More often it is due to the hectic pace of life and the requirements placed on our families from all sides, including having to work on Sundays. At the same time, this pandemic might also change what we see as essential in the future, too, and help us be more creative in reaching those who can’t get to worship on a Sunday morning.

No matter what happens around us, the Spirit is at work within us. May we be open to receiving whatever its message is for us today and every day. I love and miss you all, and I especially look forward to hearing the sounds of our kids laughing in the halls of the church again!

Carissa Gigliotti
Youth & Family Ministry Director

Since we went online, Child & Youth Education has not stopped. We have been doing our best to stay connected to our Sunday School families and youth in various new and creative ways. We have been utilizing Class Dojo to share lessons and connect with our children in PK-8. To make it a little more fun, we created the "Connection Champs" award.

Each week during our mini worship service, Carissa has been sharing the winner of the award during her children's message. The award is given to the class that has the highest percentage of points for the week (Sunday-Saturday) based on the number of participants in the class. Points are earned for watching the lessons, participating in discussions, answering questions, posting photos/videos, completing extra projects, and also for joining Youth Choir and MHY group Zoom meetings. The first week, on Palm Sunday, Ms. Nichole's 1st & 2nd

Grade class took the award. They really got into the spirit of Palm Sunday from home!

This past week, on Easter, the Middle High Youth were the champs. They did an amazing job sharing Easter love with their Senior Pals! If your child is participating and not getting points on Class Dojo, please email Carissa@nativityucc.org, send a message through Class Dojo messages, or post a comment in any of the week's class stories and let us know what your child has done to connect. We only know what we see or hear about. ☺ We look forward to continuing to find meaningful (and helpful) ways to keep everyone connected!

Child & Youth Education



**GREAT
BIG
beautiful
WORLD**

**VBS 2020
August 17-21
9:30 am - noon**

*You can register online on
our homepage at
nativityucc.org*

Coffee Hour Update

I miss seeing everyone at our weekly Sunday Coffee Hours. Due to the continued physical/social distancing needed, future Coffee Hours are cancelled at least until June. By that time we



will be switching to our Summer Coffee Hours anyway, which are held between the services for the months of June, July and August. Thank you to all the Hosts/Hostesses and Bakers. I look forward to your participation in the near future. My prayers continue for our church family's continued health and well-being.

Helen Cyruk

**Like Us on Facebook,
Church of the Nativity United Church of Christ**



Learning New Ways to Connect

“The best-laid plans of mice and men / Go oft awry” by Robert Burns comes to mind as everyone’s plans for Spring took an abrupt turn. The positive side is that this turn allowed us to be even more creative in how we relate to each other and even more important to take a moment to appreciate how important we are to each other. It is a moment in time where we universally “Share the Love.”

The Middle High Youth jumped right in and found new ways to connect with each other and to let the members of the Church of the Nativity know that they were thinking of them. They wanted to find a way to make this Easter special. The youth made Easter crosses that they mailed to members of the congregation (*see photos on page 7*). They wished they could have included everyone, but never fear, you never know what will turn up in your mailbox or in your email. They have also been trying to relax by turning to their artistic side coloring encouraging quotes of scripture. A heartfelt thank you to our families for supporting these activities.

We received some very nice messages from

individuals who received these surprises. Most members shared the special place they hung their gifts. Those messages were genuinely appreciated. The love went full circle.

Our youth group has also jumped on the “Zoom” wave which is our new way to see and speak with each other. It really is comforting being able to see the smiling faces of our youth rather than read words in an email or text. It is even better to hear their laughter which is the best medicine. We have shared crafts instructions, answered get to know you questions, played word games and, most fun, we shared getting to know each other’s pets, who insist on being on camera. We hope to join with some other youth groups this month for a Zoom game night.

We are not sure what is ahead but we are sure we will be doing it together.

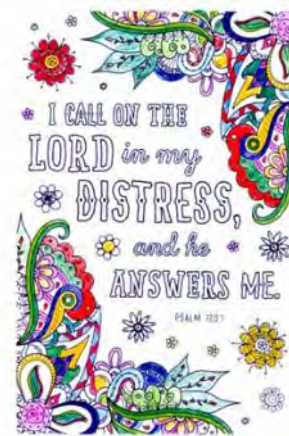
“Once you choose hope anything is possible.”

~ Christopher Reeve

Youth Advisors,
Barbara Vaughan, Mike Reed & Janet Vaughan



This is what the Middle High Youth Group meetings look like now. One main difference is we cannot share our snacks!



Scripture passages pertinent to the current situation colored by MHY members. Very intricate designs!





During this time when we are not able to worship in person, donations can be made using the PayPal button on the homepage of our website, www.nativityucc.org or by mailing a check to Church of the Nativity, 1530 Colvin Blvd., Buffalo, NY 14223. You can also use electronic bill pay options offered at all financial institutions.

Yours in Christ,
Betsy DiVita, Chair

TRUSTEES MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORT

Period	GENERAL FUND - YEAR TO DATE								
	Pledge Income Received (3)	Additional Revenue (1)	Total Revenue	Weekly Average Pledge Income	General Fund Expenses	Building Fund (2)			
						Beginning Balance	Revenue	Expenses	Ending Balance
1/1-3/31/2020	\$ 72,465	\$ 6,303	\$ 78,768	\$ 4,531	\$ 72,661	\$ 3,378	\$ 377	\$ 1,956	\$ 1,799
1/1-3/31/2019	\$ 73,338	\$ 18,178	\$ 91,516	\$ 4,500	\$ 74,225	\$ 1,334	\$ 137	\$ -	\$ 1,471

(1) Additional revenue from Holiday Offerings, Fundraising Revenue, Facilities Use donations, Endowment Fund Transfers, etc.

(2) The Building Fund is a separate fund that is kept in the General Fund checking account as of July 2017. On 2/20/2020, the Church purchased floor cleaning/stripping/waxing equipment in the amount of \$1,956.

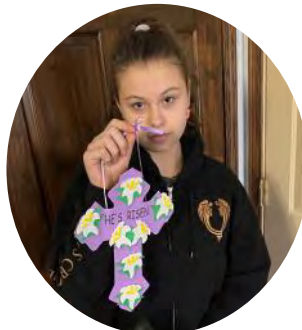
(3) 2019 amount includes \$2,590 in pledges received for 2018.

The information above is based on weekly activity. Please be aware that the impact of the weather, the date of the holidays on the calendar, and other circumstances may affect revenues and expenses for each year.

Middle High Youth Making Easter Special



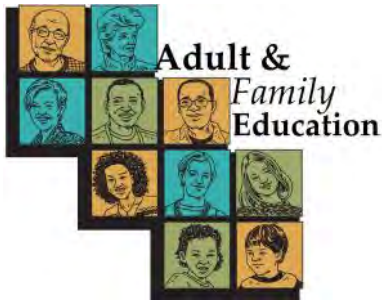
Easter crosses created by two Middle High Youth Group members. Two of the blessed recipients appear at far right.



Thank you to the Middle High Youth and their teachers for the lovely Easter crosses that they made and sent out to us seniors. What a beautiful thought; I'm sure that everyone was thrilled to receive them. (from Ruth Guyker)



Larry Van Heusen and Bob Scharf send out a bountiful THANK YOU to the Middle High Youth of Church of the Nativity UCC who mailed us this neat Easter Cross decoration with lilies and everything. We believe we have been the object of Love.



All **Small Groups** are currently on hold with physical meetings, but if a group wants to connect virtually via Zoom, please let Carissa Gigliotti know when and she can set it up for you. We encourage everyone to stay connected with each other during this time.

The **Spring Retreat** scheduled for May is currently on hold. We will notify everyone if it can and will be rescheduled.



The flowers adorning the altar for the online Easter Worship Service were provided by:



Tanya Bellavia
In Memory of her father, D. Glenn Rodeheaver

Paul & Patty Daddario
In Memory of Ernest Benner and George Daddario

Judy Deck
*In Memory of her husband, Ted & her parents,
Norm and Charline Zent*

Chris Duchscherer
In Memory of Arlene and Philip Duchscherer

Christine Garrett
In Memory of Loved Ones

Jim & Ruth Guyker
In Memory of their Dear Parents

Cindy Kowal
In Memory of Betty Corser

The Orleman Family
In Memory of Loved Ones

Roberta Richeal
In Memory of Rose Perthes and Clifford L. Richeal

Barbara & Jean Riedel
In Memory of Loved Ones



HAPPY
*Mother's
Day* **to all the women
of Nativity!**

Comments from the Congregation



The following are a selection of the many kind thoughts received from Nativity members & friends in the last few weeks about the weekly updates & various online services. They are appreciated more than words can express!

Thank you for keeping in touch. It is a comforting feeling knowing you are there.

* * * * *

Pastor Ruth, I am so glad you guys are doing these online services. I usually can't go to church because of work, so this is great to watch and feel like I'm sitting in one of the pews! Great job!

* * * * *

Thank you all so very much for the beautiful Palm Sunday service. It was so very meaningful, and we sincerely appreciate your inspirational messages and beautiful music!

* * * * *

Thank you so much, Ruth, for your inspirational Fireside Chat. Your services and chats really help.

* * * * *

I think you have done an incredible job with making us still feel connected together! Miss you too! I hope you remain safe and well! Happy Easter!

* * * * *

Thank you so much Pastor Ruth and to the entire group for putting together such a beautiful Easter Service. We really appreciated watching and being part of it. Our day was made much happier by all your efforts! We miss you too!! Happy Easter!

* * * * *

We just listened to yesterday's service, and we agreed, it was EXCELLENT! Please tell everyone you all did an excellent job being "on the air (and on video)." We wish all of you GOOD HEALTH as we work our way through this pandemic!

Excitement On Our Walk (CROP 2020)



One of the positive things to come out of these trying times is that people are out and about walking, with the correct social distancing of course. I'd like to think we are training for the Ken-Ton CROP Hunger Walk 2020 we hope to have in late September.

With the addition of the two new participating churches (Good Shepherd Lutheran Church and St. Mark Evangelical Lutheran Church), a new host church (Kenilworth UCC), and a possible new date, we've been inspired with a number of new ideas. There are sure a lot of newnesses.

These are some thoughts we already came up with:

- How about a party *during* the Walk. It could be a tailgate party or an Open House. How about a cookout? We could get more publicity and get some off-the-street activity. If we could get some tents/shelters, and the weather cooperates, outside would be great. We could get some kids to be hawkers to entice people to help. We

could also have some displays to further educate people on hunger issues.

- Ben Franklin School and the Ken-Ton Closet (in its new location), are in the neighborhood. Let's get them involved and include donations of **clothes and food**, which could be incorporated into the day.
- Applying for a grant is also brand new, which Kenilworth UCC will attempt. It would be great to spend some money (someone else's) to make more money.

We haven't even met yet (eventually it will be virtually of course) but as you can see, we're well on our way. As always, if you would like to get involved in the planning or participate in other ways, please contact me. Feel free to pass on any ideas you may have. It's all GOOD.

Gary M. Schulenberg
garymschu@gmail.com

Chair of the Ken-Ton CROP Hunger Walk 2020

The Clean Air Coalition (CAC) Zooms Towards Answers



OUTREACH
COMMITTEE

A few weeks ago someone asked about the emerging change in my schedule as COVID-19 befell us. The questioner implied I wouldn't be as busy because of the new restrictions on our movements. I allowed for a dramatic pause and said I was just as swamped with

Clean Air. In retrospect, that was an understatement. CAC is more active than ever.

Granted, we had to cancel our many in-person meetings but we've actually increased our exchanges. Our plans for a Membership/Open House event and our Annual Dinner are likewise now non-events. But we are now more involved via conference calls and Zoom. These online gatherings are held more than ever and they also allow us to keep in touch, a very important social activity. Before each virtual meeting, we do our **PIES** check-in. PIES refers to us relating how we are, "Physically, Intellectually, Emotionally and Spiritually." This is a valuable tool for all of us. It's a great way to keep tabs on each other.

We at Clean Air continue our many campaigns and then some. Regarding Tonawanda Coke, we continue to press NYS's DEC to do its due diligence to clean up the site, which now is almost equally divided into State Superfund and State Brownfields Programs. The information that the DEC makes available on the details and steps for these tools for remediating the area is very confusing and appears to be an attempt to obfuscate what the public should expect. I'm in the process of trying to bring some clarity to this information and make it available for

public consumption. We will be utilizing the expertise of others in this unjumbling.

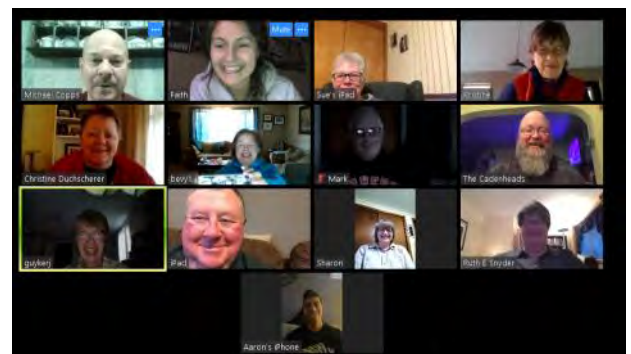
We continue our work concerning *Tonawanda Tomorrow*, our Membership/Open House drive (which we might try virtually), the American Axle site, and following up on the Buscaglia Demolition case.

Clean Air has taken on more work. As some of you may have heard, President Trump plans to relax EPA's enforcement of its rules and regulations. We consider this a hostile power grab at the behest of the oil and chemical industries, and major corporations, which further threatens our health and safety, already at risk with the coronavirus. During an intra-state and multi-state Zoom meeting, we're enlisting the help of concerned citizens and organizations and across-the-board politicians and governmental agencies to have NYS's Attorney General, Letitia James, sue the Trump Administration to force the EPA to do what its name implies.

In response to our tragic pandemic, Clean Air is offering its expertise, networking, and coordinating skills to help anyone in need. We are working on a mechanism to offer **mutual aid** to our communities. Those of you who get CAC's newsletter can see the details of this work. Otherwise, go to our website at cacwny.org.

As we reach out to each other as members of Nativity's family, the Clean Air Coalition does likewise. This creates a great partnership to care for each other and work for a society that is just and equitable.

Gary M. Schulenberg
Clean Air Coalition - Campaign Leader



Zoom meetings are now a staple of Nativity's ability to "be church" without being "in church." On the left is a virtual Church Council meeting, while above, members of the Chancel Choir enjoy their Thursday night meeting.

Reflecting on Covid 19 in Indonesia

The following was sent by mission co-worker in Indonesia, Karen Campbell-Nelson, in response to an email sent to all mission co-workers from Global Ministries Co-Executives, Rev. Dr. Julia Brown Karimu and Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson.

...When medical and laboratory resources are so limited in Indonesia, the government is faced with making hard decisions about distribution priorities. As a result, some provinces are better equipped to respond than others. Our province, in a predominantly rural-based economy of eastern Indonesia, must compete with urban areas where cases can be clearly counted and the urgency is felt more immediately. As with other provinces in eastern Indonesia, we face grave shortages of masks, ventilators, isolation spaces, plus the challenge of getting valid samples to the very few labs in the country (hours away by plane in Jakarta) where they are held in an increasingly extended waiting line. The growing number of people who ARE being tracked here challenges the untenable notion held by too many people we know, namely that our province is virus free. The number of OPD (people under observation) and PDP (patients under supervision) in our province continues to grow. These expert-sounding acronyms are, I think, being used in part to mask the reality of the province's inability to conduct adequate and reliable testing. Although the problem of shortages is nothing compared to what is being faced in hot spots in the US, should serious virus-related illnesses and deaths begin to be felt here, the shortages will be no less debilitating for doctors and nurses who must treat the ill. It has been reported that a few Indonesian doctors serving patients in Java have already died.

John and I remain healthy and seek to continue our ministry as best we can, working remotely from home as do our colleagues here. At the same time, we also have trouble knowing what is best to do sometimes. For example, we have opened our home to a few neighborhood children (grade school and jr. high levels) for a couple of small classes that includes 10-year-old Santi whose family lives with us. Crowding around a laptop screen for online lessons doesn't support social distancing, but we do insist on frequent handwashing and use the opportunity to teach the children about viruses and how they spread.



The GMIT Synod is struggling to respond effectively but also quickly. GMIT clergy, lay leaders, and youth seek to support congregations and presbyteries in responding not only to those who are ill with virus-like symptoms or most vulnerable to the virus, but also to a very large group of individuals affected by the economic impact, particularly daily wage workers and farmers whose crops failed last season due to lack of rainfall. Social media offers a plethora of educational materials, many produced by the government and NGOs, while at the same time it broadcasts false news and hoaxes. There has been significant resistance by many church members regarding the Synod's call to shift to house worship for several months. The message is made more difficult by the fact that this will affect the annual, and very popular, Easter parade organized

by church youth as well as communion and Easter services. (I should note that similar challenges are faced by the huge Muslim community throughout Indonesia as worship in mosques is also temporarily suspended in the run-up to the fasting month of Ramadan.) We join our partners in the Synod seeking to respond wisely and in faith.

I am on the US Embassy email list and, in recent days, have received almost daily alerts with the same message: if US citizens choose NOT to leave Indonesia, they should be prepared to be here for a long time (of course no one knows for how long). The dominant message of these alerts is to highlight the dwindling number of commercial flights available from Indonesia that would reach the US. The Indonesia-US flight via Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) is no longer available, and today's alert explains that flights via Tokyo will no longer be available from 1-21 April. It seems clear the embassy's concern is there may come a time when no flights to the US will be available.

The geographic gulfs that separate us may feel increasingly wide, yet the tie that binds our hearts close remains strong through Christ. Thank you for your reminders of that.

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