

CROSS

Connection



The Cross Connection is a monthly publication of the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod published for its clergy, associates in ministry, lay leadership and ecumenical partners.

From the Bishop

May 2014

God's Beloved People,

Christ is Risen!

Christ is Risen Indeed!

With these words we proclaim the center of our faith, encapsulated in our Holy Communion liturgical response: "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." "Has died." "Is Risen." "Will come." Has. Is. Will.

Here we speak of everything we know of the past, our present reality, and our future hope.

This is a "narrative," a story, THE story that defines, guides and promises life for us.

One of my favorite continuing education resources is the "Mars Hill Audio Journal, A bimonthly audio magazine of contemporary culture and Christian conviction." A recent interview with scholar Douglas Rushkoff describes his experience of "future shock" and the consequent loss of belief in the capability of stories to convey the shape of reality to us." (Volume 120).

It's Rushkoff's argument that the prevalence of digitized and electronic ways of knowing means we are most often focused on the immediate timeframe and are losing our capacity to understand our lives as embedded in a narrative, a story that gives our life movement, meaning, and direction. If the "immediate" is all that matters each second is a new world of choice rather than part of an on-going emersion with depth, value, purpose, and dignity.

I'm thinking of this today as we get ready to read the whole Passion narrative on Palm Sunday. Here we experience again the complex drama of Jesus' betrayal and the crucifixion and burial that will follow. Some of you may remember participating in the story by shouting the initial "hosannas" of the triumphal entry and then being part of the angry crowd shouting "crucify him, crucify him!" at the trial. This is how close the story entwines with our hearts, as if we were there shouting with the crowds.

This is our story. This is the narrative that shapes our self-understanding from the Garden of Eden to the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21. But what if our preoccupation is filling the data-pipe with denser and smaller bits of unrelated information? There is no story there. Could this be part of the reason why our story is falling on deaf ears or is received as a quaint and old fashioned way of marking life in the world? The implications are huge of course because without a narrative, a story, we don't have a past to refer to or a purpose to lean in to.

Today I'm grateful to know my place, even it if tells me I am both saint and sinner. Washed in promise by people of the story, I am now immersed in the story myself, and promised meaning and hope for the future. I hope you lean in to the story yourself, the narrative of salvation!



Bishop Martin Wells

The Burden of Gratitude

by Pastor Helga Jansons (Director for Evangelical Mission)

Sometimes gratitude comes naturally, like the first time we see a beautiful mountain or fall in love, or taste Vegemite (just kidding). We spontaneously thank God when something wonderful happens. But when we have to drive long distances passing all kinds of beauty we complain about the travel time, and after we have been married for a while, those annoying habits loom large. I am not sure why it is that we so readily see fault in things and people over time. It could be that we harken back to Garden of Eden: where there is so much good to choose from yet we focus on what we can't have, or on what is not right.

This can be true in our own lives where we may be dissatisfied with our lot and find it hard to accept ourselves as we are. We can easily be annoyed by those around us, and disappointed in them. We can become despondent about who is not in our church pews and fail to appreciate the people we do see week after week. We sit in our beautiful churches and worry about the future. Even in our communities, we see what isn't there and the problems, and have forgotten the reason we choose to stay.

And yet, we know that we are to "give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). We are to receive fully the forgiveness offered to us in Jesus Christ, and the love, and we are to give thanks with a grateful heart. As Christians we are to be joyful because we have new life, the resurrected life here on earth. And, in turn we are to see a child of God in every person, and every blessing as a gift from God.

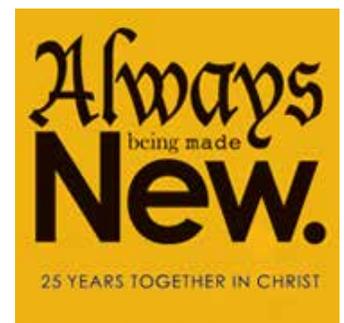
Sometimes gratitude takes effort; a "double take". We may even need to catch ourselves in the act of seeing things in terms of scarcity, and instead think of the abundance we have. It may require us to intentionally pause and take stock, to appreciate someone's good qualities in spite of what we dislike.

When I work with congregations, many are used to seeing the deficits. As an outsider I walk in and see things for the first time and appreciate the unique character and ministry of that church. The challenge is to help members to see what they are good at, what they love to do, what are the unique gifts and talents of the people, the physical assets of the church, and what they care deeply about. That is who and what they have been given, by God. No matter how many or how few talents they have collectively, these are the ones they are to multiply. Often, by trying to use these gifts in new combinations, and in new ways.

When engaging the community, even there, it is not so much a matter of finding out what the needs are so as to fill a gap or niche, but to find out some of the interests, strengths and dreams of community leaders and citizens and ask them "what do you think we could do together; as a church and a community?"

We are a resurrection people who practice faith. We don't have it all, but we do have the gift of faith and hope. We have the resurrection story in our lives and we have God's love. Have you ever tried living without it, if only to test if God is real? I have. I was miserable, and after that realized I had to tell people about God's abundant life in Christ and love for the rest of my life, every chance I had.

At the doctor's office recently I saw a young man at the counter in a wheelchair. He stood up to fill out a form and he asked for help since he was legally blind. He sounded cheerful, and accepting of his lack of vision. I couldn't resist. I had to go over to him and say "would you be willing to share how it is that you are so cheerful even though you can't walk or see well?" He was completely open to talking about his MS, what he had hoped to do with his life, his wonderful wife, and wouldn't you know it, about his faith. I think we have an obligation to try to see and name the difference it makes to be in God's loving presence. It may seem like a burden. But in doing so, we may become more cheerful and grateful.





Join us on Facebook!

<https://www.facebook.com/EasternWashingtonIdahoSynodELCA>

Ventures for Growing Stewards

Workshop 1

(For Pastors, and up to
6 Lay People from each congregation)

April 26th 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

*Zion Lutheran Church
Spokane Valley, Washington*

For further information and to RSVP
please contact Helga.jansons@elca.org
or phone 509-380-7122

**2014, not 2015
as mistakenly printed
last month**

Don't Forget!

The date for the 2014 Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod
Bishop's Convocation in Walla Walla, WA
has been changed. It will be held **October 13-16, 2014**
Speaker will be Rev. Dr. Timothy Wengert

Call Process Status

A Process beginning/congregational study	I Interim	AP Associate/Assistant Pastor
B Names received or on-site visits in process	P Pastor	VP Visitation Pastor
C Call in process/issued	CP Co-Pastor	AIM Associate in Ministry
NV New Vacancy	LP Lead Pastor	L Lay Position
TC Term call	SP Supply Pastor	TM Transition Minister (available for the open-ended call)
VP Visitation Pastor		

POS	LOCATION/CONGREGATION	STATUS	PASTORAL CARE
P	Boise, ID – King of Glory	NV	Kari Sansgaard LP
P	Bonnors Ferry, ID – Trinity	B	Kimberly Meinecke I
P	Chelan, WA – Fullness of God	A	Elizabeth Damico
P	Chewelah, WA – St. Paul	NV	Betty Krafft SP
P	Coeur d'Alene, ID – Trinity	A	Tom Inch I
P	Gifford, ID – Good Hope	A	Valerie Beesley TEEM
P	Grandview, WA – Immanuel Lutheran	A	Gary Rhode L
P	Kamiah, ID -- Faith Lutheran	A	Art Finney I
P	Moses Lake, WA – Immanuel Lutheran	B	Phylis Stromme I
P	Pocatello, ID – Church of the Good Shepherd	A	Barbara Harrison-Condon I
P	Sandpoint, ID – First Lutheran	A	Bob Chenault I
P	Spokane, WA—Bethlehem Lutheran	NV	Steve Wee SP
P	Terrace Heights, WA—Tree of Life	NV	Mo Garcia L
P	Thayne, WY—Star Valley United Church	NV	Al Schoonover SP

Retirements

Rev. Marilyn DeVeer, Grace Lutheran - Horseshoe Bend, ID will retire effective May 31, 2014

Rev. Dan Riecke, First Lutheran - Kennewick, WA will retire effective June 1, 2014

Your Church in Action

We ask that you keep the ministry of the church, our synod, and the whole world as well as those listed below in your prayers . . .

We Pray

Rev. Craig Groseclose on the recent passing of his mother.

Rev Laura Lynn (Blackfoot & Firth, ID) for continued recovery and healing after surgery.

Rev. Rick Evenson (Medical Lake, WA) as he continues treatment for multiple myeloma.

Rev. Ginny Krekling (Ellensburg, WA) for continued healing after knee surgery.

Rev. Ron Jettter (Heartlinks Hospice Sunnyside, WA) and his family, on the passing of both of his parents.

The family of Rev. Ernie Collard on his passing

Linda Hull and the family of Rev. Elliott Hull on his passing.

Rev. Jeryl Phillips-Kelly as she recovers from a horse riding accident.

Prayer Requests . . . to be included or removed from the Synod Prayer Request list, please send your request to the synod office@ewidsynod.org, or call 509-838-9871.

Presiding bishop

Elizabeth A. Eaton

Act of indescribable beauty

Crucifixion led to defeat of sin, death—only through death, resurrection of Jesus



MICHAEL D. WATSON

In 2010, I was part of the Northeastern Ohio Synod/Roman Catholic Diocese of Youngstown pilgrimage to Germany and Italy. We visited Martin Luther sites and then traveled to Rome.

It was an interesting experience to be in the places that formed our spiritual identities in the company of those who, in our respective narratives, had the role of the “other,” or even

the “enemy,” during and after the Reformation. But we came to a deeper respect and appreciation for each other’s tradition by being pilgrims together.

All of us were asked what the most memorable part of the trip was. For me that moment came after I was home.

The last day in Rome I caught a lulu of a cold. As I lay in bed the Friday after we returned searching the TV for a football game, I came across a televangelist. I was mesmerized. He was preaching to a packed house in a converted NBA coliseum. His text was from Matthew 21, the story of Jesus cursing the fig tree, the disciples’ wonderment at Jesus’ authority and Jesus’ teaching about faith being able to move mountains.

The televangelist’s exegesis (explanation) of the passage led him to conclude that Jesus said we must “speak to the mountain”—prayer was not enough. If we wanted a better job we needed to “speak to that mountain” and all the heavenly forces would be set in motion. Poor health? Fear of foreclosure? Troubled marriage? “Speak to that mountain” and get it fixed.

Wow. When my father was dying why didn’t I speak to that mountain? When Paul prayed three times that the thorn in his flesh be taken away, why didn’t he speak to that mountain? Here it was, the “Name It and Claim It Health and Wealth Gospel.” The people in that arena were cheering.

At that point I remembered our stop at the Flossenburg concentration camp in Germany. This is where theologian

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was brutally executed just before the end of World War II: Bonhoeffer who spoke against “cheap grace” or what I have come to call “entitlement grace”; Bonhoeffer who in his ministry and death experienced the costly grace of discipleship.

Flossenburg was a forced labor camp. Inmates worked in rock quarries until they died of exhaustion, exposure, starvation or disease. The prison population was 20 percent Jewish. The rest were political prisoners, the mentally ill, addicts, homosexuals, prisoners of war and the Roma people. One Flossenburg survivor who had been transferred from Auschwitz said the slow death of the labor camp was worse.

After liberation the surviving prisoners constructed a stone chapel out of the rubble of the guard towers. In it was a stone triptych behind the altar. On one side panel was carved the image of a prisoner trying to lift an impossibly heavy block of stone while being beaten by a guard. On the other side panel was a carving of a woman bent under the weight of a basket of rubble as a child clung to her. Our guide said the basket of rubble represented the awful burden of the women left behind when the men were taken to the camp.

In the center panel was a carving of Jesus on the cross. Here, literally carved in stone, was the theology of the cross.

In the midst of our suffering, because of our suffering, because of the suffering we cause, is the cross of Christ. There was no place for the empty promise of the ‘Name It and Claim It’ gospel.

In the midst of our suffering, because of our suffering, because of the suffering we cause, is the cross of Christ. There was no place for the empty promise of the “Name It and Claim It” gospel. There was only space for the cross, carved by the bruised hands of the suffering.

The speak-to-the-mountain-theology-of-glory is a tempting and seductive message. It packs churches and raises money. It is happy, upbeat, fun—but empty.

When Paul prayed that his affliction be taken away the Lord answered, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” It turns out that the televangelist was partly right. The heavenly forces were set in motion, but it was motion that led to the defeat of sin and death only through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Jesus’ crucifixion was neither pretty nor happy, but it was an act of indescribable beauty that brings true joy. □

A monthly message from the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Her email address: bishop@elca.org.

This column originally appeared in the April issue of *The Lutheran*. Reprinted with permission.

Don't Wait! - Health Assessment - Take It Now!



If you have ELCA-Primary health benefits, we need your help. Take the 2014 Mayo Clinic Health Assessment on the EmbodyHealth web portal at www.elcaforwellness.org before April 30th. We'll be one person closer to 65% participation that save thousands of dollars on your premiums, and you'll earn a \$150 credit of Wellness Dollars to offset out-of-pocket medical costs.

The assessment is confidential, simple to complete, and you do not need to know specific numbers such as blood pressure or cholesterol. You can even answer a question with "I don't know." We need 18 more people with Portico as their primary benefits provider to do their part. ***Deadline is April 30th***

Find instructions for taking the health assessment at
myPortico.PorticoBenefits.org

Lutheran Campus Ministry at EWU Annual Auction

**Western Themed Dinner
Beer and Wine
Live & Silent Auction
(With Dessert Auction)**

April 26, 2014

Doors Open at 5:00 PM

**Central Lutheran Church
512 S. Bernard Street
Spokane, Washington 99204**

**\$20 per person
\$140 if purchase Table of Eight**

**Tickets may be purchased by contacting:
Debra at 509.926.5407
Pastor Shelley at pastor@lcmewu.com**

**Donations may be dropped off at
639 Elm Street, Cheney, WA 99004
(or call and arrangements will be made for pickup)**

**As always your presence and donations are greatly
appreciated. You make this evening our most
successful fundraiser!**

Cash, Check and Credit Cards Accepted

MISSION INTERPRETER TRAINING

We have a wonderful ELCA, one worth knowing about and sharing. Mission Interpreters share the story - and the stories - about what our ELCA is doing around the country and around the world. Can you be a part of that mission?

Pastors, do you know someone who would be a good storyteller?

There will be a training session for Mission Interpreters on Saturday, June 14 from 9 am to noon at Central Lutheran Church, 512 S. Bernard in Spokane. Contact Betty Krafft at 509-768-3138 if you can attend.

Celebrating Anniversaries of Ordination

5-16-1954	Rev. Sam Babbington	Spokane, WA	60 years
5-31-1959	Rev. Dick Grudt	Pasco, WA	55 years
5-24-1964	Rev. Todd Penson	Wenatchee, WA	50 years

Oso Relief

The ELCA Northwest Washington Synod and Lutheran Community Services Northwest (LCSNW), in consultation with Lutheran Disaster Response, are partnering to help provide assistance to individuals and families impacted by the recent natural disaster in Snohomish County, Washington.

Lutherans have a reputation for being there for the "long haul" when disasters occur. Donations received will be used to address both immediate and long-term needs. Funds will be administered by LCSNW and distributed through the NW Washington Synod, local congregations and agencies in the affected area.

If you would like to make a donation, please make your check out to "Lutheran Community Services Northwest" and note "Oso Mudslide Fund" on the memo line. Mail your check to

Lutheran Community Services Northwest
Attn: Oso Mudslide
4040 S. 188th Street, Suite 300
SeaTac, WA 98188

To donate on line, go to: <https://lcsnw.ejoinme.org/MyPages/OsoMudslideReliefFund/tabid/530026/Default.aspx>

Thank you!

Last month's photo was taken at the west end of Coeur d'Alene Park in Spokane, All Saints Lutheran Church will be undergoing some very big changes this Spring. The Peaceful Valley Community Center will soon be offering After School Programs at the church.

Send photos from your your congregation to be included in "Where in the Synod is that?"

Creating Meaningful Service and Mission Experiences with Youth Friday, May 30, 6:30-8:30pm, and Saturday, May 31, 9am-4pm Messiah Lutheran Church, 4202 N Belt, Spokane, WA

Service projects and mission trips have the potential to be transformative experiences for youth. However, leaders often get **caught up in logistics and forget (or aren't sure how) to make these experiences meaningful for young people.** This leadership training event introduces participants to a service learning model that can add richness and meaning to youth service experiences (such as a summer mission trip or fall service project) and includes a local service project to provide a hands-on example.



The training will be led by Professor Mark Jackson of Trinity Lutheran College, lead trainer with the Service And Learning Leadership Team (SALLT) Project. Mark formerly served on staff at Central Lutheran Church in Spokane and was an active leader with the **synod's** Lutheran Youth Organization.

Congregations are invited to send teams of youth ministry leaders (including high school youth!) to share in the learning process together. For more information or to register your group, contact Messiah Lutheran Church at 509-327-4446 or office@messiah.comcastbiz.net. Registration fee of \$5 includes the training, Friday evening snack, and Saturday snacks. Please bring a lunch. High school youth are free and must attend with a paid adult.



Northwest Washington Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Building Safe Communities

Upcoming Opportunities

Boundaries Training

For all Rostered Leaders & Professional Staff

Thursday, May 29th 10am - 4pm

at Christ Lutheran Church in Federal Way (note location change!)

Join leaders from around the Northwest Washington and Southwestern Washington synods for an all-day boundaries training to help us understand how to keep ourselves healthy and to ensure that our needs as leaders are met without participation by those we serve. Boundaries Training provides clear information on misconduct prevention for people in positions of power and anyone who works with children and other vulnerable people. This training will be led by Pastor Mark Nelson, Coordinator for Missional Leadership of the Region 1 of the ELCA and Pastor Susan Kintner, Assistant to the Bishop of the Oregon Synod. The ELCA requires that all rostered leaders attend Boundaries Training at least once, early during their period of rostered service. Rostered leaders are strongly encouraged to take this training again if they have not taken the course in the last ten years.

Cost is \$20, includes materials and lunch.

For Those Who May Serve In A Church Where Clergy Misconduct Has Previously Occurred

Friday June 6th 10am - 4pm at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Renton

Clergy misconduct, and the resulting violation of trust, is a devastating event in the life of a congregation. While steps are taken to prevent misconduct, the unhealthy dynamics it can create within the congregation may persist for years. ELCA Misconduct Consultant Barbara Keller will lead a workshop for all pastors who, intentionally or unintentionally, find themselves in this ministry situation. Interim pastors are especially encouraged to attend, and all clergy are invited.

Cost is \$20, includes materials and lunch.

Boundaries Workshop

For Those Working With Children & Youth

Saturday June 7th 9:30am - 12:30pm at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Renton

The NW WA and SW WA synods are hosting a half-day workshop on healthy boundary issues for those in congregations and ministries who work with children, youth, and other vulnerable populations. This is a perfect event for full-time or part-time staff members and volunteers. ELCA Misconduct Consultant Barbara Keller will lead this workshop.

Cost is \$10, includes materials and morning refreshments.

[Online Registration Click Here](#)

For more information:

Northwest Washington Synod, ELCA susan@lutheransnw.org

"God's work. Our hands." Sunday Sept. 7, 2014



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,
"God's work. Our hands." Sunday celebrates who we are as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America — one church, freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor. On **Sunday, Sept. 7, 2014**, ELCA congregations will gather once again for a day dedicated to serving the communities in which we live. Every day you do the work of serving your neighbors and sharing God's love with others. "God's work. Our hands." Sunday provides us with the opportunity to do God's work together.

The first "God's work. Our hands." Sunday, held in 2013, gave members of all ages an opportunity to live out their faith in service to others. As a church that believes God is calling us into the world together, we shared Jesus' love with our neighbors through a multitude of service projects — from preparing meals for people who are homeless to cleaning up beaches and parks, from visiting with the elderly to writing letters to military personnel. We did all of this and more.

We hope you are considering plans to organize a day of service. To help guide your congregation's planning, download a toolkit at www.ELCA.org/dayofservice. T-shirts are once again available from Old Lutheran to help increase the visual impact across the ELCA. Sign up your congregation for the day of service by following the simple steps listed below. This will allow us to keep your congregation updated with new information for what we pray will be another remarkable day of service. **Register in four steps:**

1. Click [here](#) to go to the **Registration** page
2. Insert your Congregational ID number
3. Insert your ELCA member number: **L022791**
4. Provide contact information and answer a few questions

Shortly after Sept. 7, we will invite you to share stories about your congregation's participation. Send your stories and photos to LivingLutheran@elca.org, so that together we can celebrate what God accomplishes through you. We are church together. We are church for the sake of the world. With our hands, we do God's work of restoring and reconciling communities in Jesus Christ's name throughout the world. I look forward to doing this work together on "God's work. Our hands." Sunday and every day.
In Christ who frees us,

Elizabeth A. Eaton

Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

[Register your congregation](#) for
"God's work. Our hands."
Sunday.



Plan your day from start to finish using this [toolkit](#).



Order your [T-shirts](#) today!

Yellow: wear it, share it.

**EASTERN
WASHINGTON
IDAHO SYNOD**

of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

314 S. Spruce St., Suite A
Spokane, WA 99201-5823



May 2014 Newsletter

Let Down the Nets

Lifting Our Vision
Jesus First, Last, Always
God's Grace, Our Gratitude
The Spirit Powers Us
No Fear! Transformation
Connections Multiply Miracles
Go, Tell & Serve



Please reproduce any and all articles for publication in congregational newsletters or bulletins.
The **Cross Connection** is also available on the synod website at
<http://www.ewaidssynod.org/synodpublications.html>.
Deadline for articles is the 5th of each month.

Synod Calendar

April 2014

- 26 LCM-EWU Auction at Central Lutheran Spokane
- 26 Ventures Training at Zion, Spokane Valley

May 2014

- 2 Ventures Workshop at Tree of Life, Yakima
- 3 Mission Interpreter Training at Immanuel, Moses Lake
- 4 Bloomsday
- 16-18 Synod Assembly in Spokane, WA
- 19 Synod Office Closed
- 26 Memorial Day (Synod Office Closed)
- 31 Service Learning Youth Event at Messiah Lutheran - Spokane

June 2014

- 2 Mission Interpreter Training at Central Lutheran Spokane



Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our Hands

Staff

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THE PARISH PAPER

IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

Coeditors: Herb Miller and Cynthia Woolever - www.TheParishPaper.com

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How to Welcome Children with Autism and Their Families

Kylie, an active five-year-old, does not speak but she is learning sign language. Sometimes Kylie's behavior is similar to what professionals see in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Her parents want to attend church with Kylie and her two younger brothers. Unfortunately, several disappointing worship experiences have discouraged them from seeking out another church. They remain hopeful that they can eventually find a congregation committed to nurturing the spiritual growth of all their children.

Common Areas of Difference

A diagnosis of ASD indicates that an individual might be impacted in his or her social interaction, communication, and behavior. The word spectrum conveys that no two individuals are alike. There is a wide variety in how people can be affected. An understanding of possible differences can help church teachers and members plan for the inclusion of all children.¹

Language skills. Some individuals with ASD may be unable to speak or to use sign language, while others may possess a broad vocabulary but find grammar and sentence structure tricky. Sometimes their voices are too loud or too soft for the setting. Matching the content of the message (such as sad news) with the appropriate facial expression or voice tone is another type of struggle for some.

Social skills. Children with ASD find that reading social situations and making decisions about how to interact with others extremely hard. These types of differences can lead children to pull away from others. They may find eye contact or touch uncomfortable. Some children respond in the opposite way by charging into a group or acting aggressively toward others. Because social situations are not easy to analyze, a schedule or routine provides structure and a bridge to others for those with ASD. Any change in the routine can create anxiety.

Another feature that individuals with ASD can exhibit is a repetitive passion for one topic—such as trains, trucks, a favorite animal, or a book character. As a result, they may find it tough to relate to others who do not know as much about their topic or show little interest in it.

Sensory Responses. The sensory systems of many people with ASD are turned up to a higher volume. This creates a sensitivity to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and feelings that would not be a problem for individuals without ASD. In striking contrast, the sensory systems for others with ASD are set way below the average for others. In this case, a child may not respond to conversation or touch.

Strategies for Inclusion

Barbara Newman, author of *Autism and Your Church*, outlines strategies that she uses with children and adults who have ASD. She believes that churches do not wish to exclude or isolate any individual but that they may not have the necessary information to include persons with different abilities. Her strategies open up the possibilities for welcoming all people (not just individuals with



"ROUTINES HELP CHILDREN WITH ASD
FEEL SECURE...LUCKILY FOR BILLY,
YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED THE MUSIC FOR 65 YEARS."

ASD, but all those who find access to church life challenging), such as those who use wheelchairs; those with hearing loss or impaired vision; worshipers dealing with memory loss, dementia, or Alzheimer's; and people who suffer from mental or chronic illness.

Strategy 1: Gather information. Newman suggests that the congregation appoint one person to contact the family, care facility, or group home to assess gifts and needs. Privacy is always a concern. Church teachers should show respect for the amount and type of information individuals wish to share and reassure families that information would only be shared at their request. Because they do it all the time, parents of children with autism: (a) may be tired of telling the same things to different people in every situation they encounter; (b) are good at outlining who their child is and what their child needs. Listening, practicing patience, and asking for clarification are greatly appreciated by parents.

Strategy 2: Share information as needed. Pastors, other worship leaders, teachers, mentors, and peers benefit from critical information in order to best plan and interact with children.

Strategy 3: Monitor sensory output. Newman suggests setting up a rest or "reset" area that individuals with ASD can use when they need a break from loud noises or too much social interaction. A small room with limited sound and few distractions works best. Headphones or sound blockers are another option to filter out sounds and background noise.

Strategy 4: Take their perspective. When children have trouble or upsetting situations occur, they may not be able to communicate what is bothering them. Teachers and mentors can think through several questions to uncover what might be wrong: What happened immediately before and right after the incident? Who else is part of the setting? Can they share insights into the person's behavior? If the child attends school or participates in another program, ask if someone can talk to the teacher or observe the child in another setting. Learning and seeing what works well for the child in other settings increases the odds that the church can make helpful changes in the church's environment.

Strategy 5: Make comfortable routines. Because children and adults with ASD may not be able to process everything that is happening around them, they rely on routines to provide structure. Everyone needs to feel secure and others in the church can benefit as well. For example, a printed order of worship, picture schedules (a set of pictures that illus-

trate the sequence of activities), and projected PowerPoint slides that highlight the current activity all work well. Including ways that the child or adult can serve and offer their gifts is a good strategy for creating meaning in the routine. Depending on the individual's ability, they could be a greeter, hand out bulletins, light candles, help with food or table preparation, or other church activities.

Strategy 6: Use advance warning systems. Before a nurse sets up an IV, she describes to the patient what she is going to do and why and what a patient might experience. She also periodically asks how the patient is doing. Giving the patient this type of advance warning reduces anxiety and builds trust.

In the church setting, teachers can give a verbal countdown during class ("In five minutes our class will end and we'll go to the sanctuary for worship."); use a special clock that visually displays disappearing time; and hand parents or guardians printed information about any upcoming activity that is not usually part of the routine.

Strategy 7: Multiply communication. To reach those with limited language skills, become familiar with any electronic communication devices that they may use. Consider recruiting mentors to learn and use signing.

Strategy 8: Use visual cues. To reinforce verbal messages, try to think in pictures. Use paper and pencil to sketch or write notes. Some children find drawing a picture of what happened or their feelings easier than verbal descriptions. Churches with strength in the arts, photography, and media are especially equipped to communicate effectively with children in worship.

Everyone is Welcome Here!

Jessica described herself to her mother: "My body has autism, but my spirit does not." She attends a church that shares the conviction that her connection to God is not hindered by ASD.²

By emphasizing all that we have in common and that we all belong to God, congregations can transform children, adults, and families. "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."³

1. The content of this issue draws from Barbara Newman, *Autism and Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Friendship Ministries, 2011). Her book includes many reproducible resources. See also www.TheParishPaper.org/free-resources.

2. Newman, 17.

3. 1 Corinthians, 12:27.