

Insights and experiences from ELCA missionaries Marissa and Viking Dietrich in Berlin where Viking serves as Regional Representative in Europe for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Service and Justice Unit.

***I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. Isaiah 43:19***

Dear Friends,

This has always been one of my favorite verses. In Isaiah, this message is delivered to a people in captivity, a generation of people cut off from the past and uncertain about the future. It is a message of hope, a proclamation that God is acting in the world to create something new. It is a promise to those who feel lost in the wilderness, a promise that God will make a path forward.

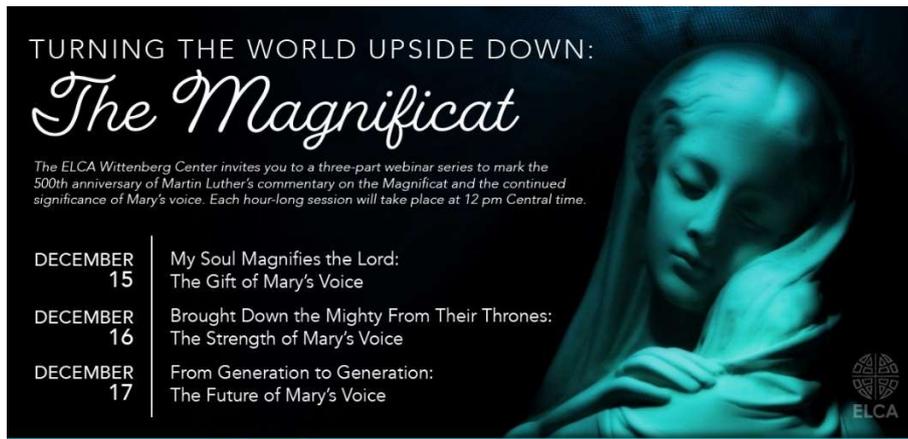
Do you not perceive it? For the person hearing this proclamation, the answer is no. We are in the wilderness of loss and uncertainty. People do a great disservice to this text when they answer yes to this question and then wield this text to convince others of our own vision of the future. The promise of something new is a promise held by the person who does not know what the future will bring. It is God's promise, God's Word, that evokes faith in the future despite current circumstances, despite our lack of ability to know the future, like a light in the darkness.

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). Noah built the ark, knowing the past was finished, not knowing the future. Abraham left his homeland for a place unknown. Sarah put her faith in a promise of future descendants, despite her age. Isaac and Jacob both gave their children blessings for the future. By faith, the parents of Moses hid him. By faith, Moses left the comforts of life in the Pharaoh's house for something more important but not yet perceived.

The season of Advent is a time to contemplate the coming of Jesus, a time of anticipation, a time of hope. Before the court of this world, Paul describes the early Christians as a people living *in hope that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous (Acts 24:15)*. In his letter to the Romans, Paul explains that *in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (Rom 8:24-5)*.

Whatever might be the difficult circumstances of your life now, may your Advent and Christmas seasons be a time of anticipation and hope, of patience and renewed faith in God who *plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. (Jer 29:11)*.

Viking and Marissa



Five-hundred years ago, Martin Luther published his Commentary on the “Magnificat” or Mary’s Song from Luke 1:46-55. This text was sung or read at every evening prayer for well over a thousand years. It also is a primary reading for worship in the season of Advent. The ELCA Wittenberg Center invites you to a **three-part** webinar entitled “The Magnificat: Turning the World Upside Down.”

This webinar series is a collaborative effort across the Service and Justice unit of the ELCA led by the Europe Desk through the ELCA Wittenberg Center. In each of the one-hour sessions, the Director of the Center, the Rev. Dr. Robert Moore will host two guest speakers. Each of the featured speakers will bring a unique perspective to both the biblical text and Luther’s commentary.

Session 1 : Wednesday Dec 15, “My Soul Magnifies the Lord: The Gift of Mary’s Voice”

Rev. Dr. Wanda Deifelt (Luther College) & the Rev. Heidi Neumark (Trinity Lutheran, Manhattan) will explore the biblical text from Luke, it’s interpretation, and use over the centuries.

Session 2 : Thursday Dec 16: “Brought Down the Mighty from Their Thrones: The Strength of Mary’s Voice”

The Rev. Dr. Mary Lowe (Augsburg University) & the Rev. Angela Trejo Hagger (Lutheran Augsburg Seminary in Mexico) will explore Luther’s Commentary on the Magnificat and the response with the church to Mary’s song.

Session 3 : Friday Dec 17: “From Generation to Generation: The Future of Mary’s Voice”

The Rev. Dr. Guy Erwin (United Lutheran Seminary) & the Rev. Dr. Mercedes Garcia Bachmann (Institute for Pastoral Contextual Studies of the Lutheran Church in Argentina and Uruguay (IELU)) will explore the implication of the texts for the future of humanity and all creation.

All sessions will be held from 12:00 to 1:00 pm Central Standard Time (Chicago). Both English and Spanish language interpretation will be available during this webinar series.

Please register in advance. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar. Later, a free copy of Luther’s Commentary on the Magnificat, courtesy of Fortress Press, will be sent to you.

To register go to: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_vAFQQPECTmGVRT5S0wolsQ

Also, “like” and “follow” the ELCA Wittenberg Center on Facebook for more information about this and upcoming opportunities at: [Facebook/ELCAWittenbergCenter](https://www.facebook.com/ELCAWittenbergCenter)

The ELCA Wittenberg Center

Here is a little more about the speakers during the webinar “The Magnificat: turning the world upside down”



The Rev. Dr. Wanda Deifelt is a Brazilian theologian serving as professor of religion at Luther College in Decorah, IA. She is an ordained Lutheran pastor and has served as theological advisor to many ecumenical organizations (World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, Latin American Council of Churches, *etc.*). Her publications are on embodiment, feminist and liberation theologies, ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue, religious pluralism in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the encounter of religion with literature and art.



The Rev. Heidi Neumark's strong passion for social justice kept her in the South Bronx where she served congregations for twenty years. Her first book, the award-winning *Breathing Space: A Spiritual Journey in the South Bronx* tells that story. For the past eighteen years she has continued her passion as pastor of the multicultural, bilingual, Trinity Lutheran Church on Manhattan's Upper West Side. She initiated support groups for Latino members, and programs for low-income, immigrant children and homeless LGBT youth. Her latest book is *Sanctuary: Being Christian in the Wake of Trump*.

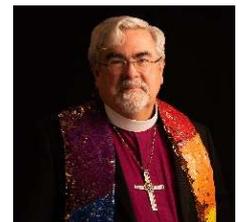


Dr. Mary Elise Lowe is Professor of Religion at Augsburg University in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her teaching and research focus on contemporary theologies, LGBTQIA+ theologies, Martin Luther's theology, and disability theologies. Her most recent chapters and articles include “A Lutheran View of Conscience: Bound and Free, Constrained and Embodied” and “The Queer Body-Mind in Martin Luther's Theology: From Subaltern Sodomite to Embodied Imago Dei.” In her work and teaching, Lowe generates scholarship that is both academic for scholars and accessible for students and laypersons. Prof. Lowe was recently named as Augsburg University's next Batalden Faculty Scholar in Applied Ethics.

The Rev. Angela Trejo Haager was born in St. Paul, Minnesota and is a pastor in the Mexican Lutheran Church. As a historian, theologian, and biblical scholar, she works as coordinator of Augsburg Lutheran Seminary in Mexico City and collaborates as one of the Coordinators of the Women and Gender Justice Network for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Lutheran World Federation. She is a professor in Church History, Bible, and Gender.



The Rev. Dr. Guy Erwin has been president of United Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, since August 2020. From 2013 to 2020, Erwin served as bishop of the Southwest California Synod of the ELCA. His first love, however, is teaching and research, and from 2000 to 2013 held an endowed professorship in Lutheran studies at California Lutheran University. Before that, he taught at the Yale Divinity School for seven years. Erwin studied at Harvard and Yale (where he earned his PhD) and at the universities in Tübingen and Leipzig. He was one of the first LGBT persons ordained after the ELCA dropped its ban on LGBT clergy, and his election as bishop of the Southwest California Synod (which encompasses most of the Los Angeles metropolitan area) in 2013 made Erwin not only the first openly gay man to serve as a bishop in any of the churches of the LWF, but also the first Indigenous person to serve as a bishop in the ELCA. He is a member of the Osage Nation in Oklahoma.



The Rev. Dr. Mercedes L. García Bachmann is Director of the Instituto para la Pastoral Contextual (Institute for Pastoral Contextual Studies) of the United Evangelical Lutheran church in Argentina and Uruguay (IELU). From 1999 to 2016 she was



Professor of Old Testament at the Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos (ISEDET) in Buenos Aires, Argentina; she has been a visiting scholar around the world, e.g., in Mexico City, Chicago, and Münster. Her research interests are feminist hermeneutics and gender studies. Dr. García Bachmann's latest books are *Women at Work in the Deuteronomistic History* (Atlanta: SBL, 2013), the Judges volume in the feminist series *Wisdom* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2018) and, with Virginia R. Azcuy and Nancy E. Bedford, *Teología feminista a tres voces* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2016). She has published many articles on liberation feminist Latin American perspectives on the Bible.

Final Edition of “Nachrichten aus Berlin”

Our call as ELCA missionaries has come to an end. The position of Regional Representative in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa changed at the beginning of this year to Regional Representative in Europe, and in July it was decided that the position was no longer needed. The reduction and eventual elimination of the position was due to a new paradigm that created two Area Desk Directors in this EuMENA region both of whom would be located physically within the region.



It has been a wonderful journey, though with the pandemic, the years 2020 and 2021 were much different from the years 2017-2019. The first years, marked by travel and visits with companions, I had the great pleasure of getting to know many wonderful people in Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine, Russia, Romania, Serbia, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Germany of course, and many other places in Europe. The last two years were marked by the pandemic, and our work with companions went online. It was amazing to see so many people (I was especially impressed with the international congregations!) adapt to online technologies.

STAY CONNECTED...

If you would like to stay in touch, my email will be :

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Our mailing address will, for the time being, continue to be:

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10785 Berlin, Germany

SUPPORT SERVICE AND JUSTICE!

I hope that you will continue to support the work and witness of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Through its Service and Justice Unit, the ELCA accompanies people, communities and networks, builds more resilient communities and witnesses to faith in society. Please contact the ELCA for connections to new missionaries and new places at :

800-638-3522, ext. 2820,
or globalchurch@elca.org.

Marissa and I hope to stay in Berlin where Marissa is enjoying teaching English at the Berlin International School. We don't know what lies ahead in our story, but we are certain of God's continued grace and have faith that God will create a path forward and make something new. It has been a privilege and a blessing to serve the ELCA and its predecessor bodies in Nigeria, the USA, France, Senegal, Ghana and now Germany. We are leaving work with the ELCA with great memories of and a deep sense of gratitude.

Thank you

Marissa and I would like to thank all of you who have kept us in your prayers during these last 4½ years in Germany. We would especially like to thank congregations who have sponsored us and individuals who have supported ELCA mission work in our name. Special thanks to:

First Lutheran Church, Colorado Springs, CO
Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA
Friedens Lutheran Church, Friedens, PA
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Lanse, PA
Faith Lutheran Church, Somerset, PA
Centerville Lutheran Church, Newville, PA
Palm Lutheran Church, Palmyra, PA
St Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church, York, PA
Trinity Lutheran Church, Mechanicsburg, PA
Trindle Spring Lutheran Church, Mechanicsburg, PA
Trinity Lutheran Church, Camp Hill, PA
Centre Lutheran Church, Mifflintown, PA
St John Lutheran Church, Montgomery, PA

And to Michael and Chris Cozmanoff, Shirley Smith, Gerhard and Tami Dietrich, Linda Dietrich Eaton, and Fred and Anne Kopp.

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. John 1:16