



# THE EMMAUS ENCOUNTER

THE NEWSLETTER OF EMMAUS LUTHERAN CHURCH

FALMOUTH, ME



Social Ministry

## It's Camp Calumet Countdown!

There are ways that YOU can help youth attend Camp Calumet this summer! Please consider helping Social Ministry raise money for camperships for our youth and beyond (the Calumet Campership Fund).



**Thankoffering in May** will go to Camp Calumet Camperships. Please note "Thankoffering" on your check in the memo line, or enclose your check in your Thankoffering envelope.

### Yard Sale – May 2nd

Donations Welcome! If you have gently used items at home you no longer need, consider donating them to the big Yard Sale at Emmaus on May 2nd. Then, come shopping on May 2nd to find treasures you can't resist! All proceeds of this sale will go to the Campership Fund.



## Yard Sale!

Get ready to hunt for your next favorite find! Emmaus is hosting our annual Yard Sale on Saturday, May 2nd. From household essentials to unique hidden gems, there's something for everyone. Best of all, every purchase helps our youth head to Camp Calumet this summer! We need your help: We are looking for volunteers to assist with clean-up after the sale. If you can lend a hand, please contact the church office. See you there!



## Project Linus Blankets Update

Thank you to all who have made a blanket for the Project Linus Project! There is a beautiful, heartwarming pile of blankets in the back of the sanctuary waiting to be brought to their donation center and then distributed to children experiencing trauma. If you are still knitting, crocheting, or making knots on a fleece blanket, you still have time. Social Ministry will be collecting the blankets on May 31st and bring them to Project Linus June 1st.

Thank you for your kind and loving generosity throughout the year. If you have ideas you'd like to suggest to Social Ministry, please reach out to one of our team: Jencie G., Sarah H., Deb B., Kelly C., Sandy H., Gisela J., and Pastor Gail.

## Members of Emmaus attend local World Hunger Event

On Thursday, April 9th, six members from Emmaus, alongside other local Lutheran congregations, participated in an ELCA World Hunger Gathering held at the Preble Street Food Security Hub in South Portland.



We explored the essential contributions of Preble Street (celebrating 50 years!), Greater Portland Family Promise, and ELCA World Hunger. The ELCA employs the MERGE framework to direct their efforts, recognizing that hunger seldom arises from a single cause. They address a range of issues, including migrant justice, economic justice, racial justice, gender justice, and environmental justice.



We had a tour of the unbelievably huge kitchen at the Hub and enjoyed a delicious and nutritious lunch. Also, it was nice to see old friends from the other congregations.



The New England Synod Hunger Team is excited to share that gifts to ELCA World Hunger from our Synod will be matched dollar for dollar, up to \$50,000. Donations must be received by Pentecost Sunday, May 24. Mail to: New England Synod, PO Box 901, Worcester, MA 01613-0901  
MEMO: ELCA World Hunger

---



---

## Rejecting the notion of a “Holy War” in Iran



Alleluia! Christ is risen!

*Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.”*  
Matthew 26:51-52

Many years ago during the Vietnam War, the Rev. Charles Bergstrom chose his Easter Sunday sermon at Trinity Lutheran Church, Worcester, Massachusetts to publicly speak against the war. Pastor Bergstrom served as pastor at Trinity from 1963-1977 and then as the Executive Director of Office for Governmental Affairs for The Lutheran Church in Washington, D.C. from 1977 to 1988.

Pastor Bergstrom chose a packed church on Easter Sunday to speak against the Vietnam War because he said that people of the resurrection of Jesus

Christ cannot be people of war. He told his hearers he offered his words not as a political “dove” (the label historically assigned to those opposed to military action), nor as a reformed political “hawk” (the label historically assigned to those in favor of military action). He told his congregation that he was no kind of bird, but he was a disciple of Jesus Christ and a child of the resurrection. As such, he could not justify the Vietnam War.

I think of Pastor Bergstrom’s Easter Sermon as the United States is once again at war on Easter Sunday. Especially disturbing about this war with Iran is that the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF) received over 200 complaints from members of the United States Armed Forces about superior officers justifying war with Iran as part of a holy war to bring about Armageddon and the return of Jesus Christ to earth. One combat unit commander reportedly told his troops that the war is “part of God’s divine plan” and that “President Trump has been anointed by Jesus to light the signal fire in Iran to cause Armageddon and mark Christ’s return to Earth.”

Let me acknowledge a few things ... international affairs, diplomacy, and decisions about war and peace are complex and policy makers must weigh countless factors. Sin exists and because sin exists there will be times when force must be met with force. Lutherans and people of faith serve honorably in the Armed Forces as a noble and patriotic duty. With that said, as a child of the resurrection let me be crystal clear:

Any belief that a self-chosen war in Iran is part of God’s holy plan to bring about Armageddon and the return of Christ is a lie from the pit of hell that is be repudiated and rejected as strongly as possible.

There is so much wrong and evil about such a narcissistic and heretical belief it’s hard to know where to begin to repudiate and reject it.

[1] First, the belief is rooted in Christian Nationalism which is a nationalistic ideology that confuses the kingdom of God with a particular government. Christian Nationalism is defined by the belief that the U.S. Constitution was divinely inspired, that Christianity should be a privileged religion in the United States, and that this nation holds a uniquely privileged status in God’s eyes.

For theological reasons, the ELCA repudiates Christian nationalism as a distortion of the Christian faith that crosses the line into idolatry.” (Pg 57 – “Faith & Civic Life” ELCA Social Statement). Lutherans teach that the kingdom of God is not a nation, not a particular culture, not a racial grouping, not a form of government, and not even a denomination or a religion. (Pg 57 – “Faith & Civic Life” ELCA Social Statement). The kingdom of God is revealed in Jesus Christ and made known in the sacraments available for all peoples of Earth. That kingdom includes peoples from all tribes, languages, and nations and is so vast it cannot be counted (Revelation 7:9).

It is idolatry, and a violation of the First Commandment, when any nation claims a special blessing or a special call from God. The belief that United States military action can bring about Armageddon and the return of Jesus Christ is idolatry par excellence. Do the President and his military commanders really believe they have that much power to force God’s hand to bring about their vision of Armageddon? If so, what becomes of God in such scenario? God is turned into a servant of this nation and President! The hubris of such belief makes the Israelites and their Golden Calf seem like child’s play (Exodus 32). If Jesus himself didn’t even know the time of his return (Matthew 24:36) then how do our policy makers think they themselves can impart that knowledge into Jesus? Ridiculous.

---



---

[2] Second, the belief about Armageddon is often closely tied to the idea of the rapture which is not supported by the Bible. For a faithful Lutheran response to the contemporary imagery of Armageddon and the rapture I encourage you to read Dr. Barbara Rossing's book "The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation."

Dr. Rossing writes that while the Book of Revelation does include some terrifying imagery about what God can do, it ultimately offers imagery of what God wants to do. The terrifying imagery is a reminder that God was more powerful than the most powerful empire on Earth at the time (the Roman Empire). But this imagery does not indicate God's desire to burn up Earth and replace it. Rather, God wants to renew and restore Earth in love and healing. Dr. Rossing points out that Revelation ends with the life-giving image of the river of the water of life flanked on either side by the tree of life bearing fruit with leaves for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1:2). Life, fruit, and healing is God's desire.



Yes, Lutherans do indeed preach and teach the final return of Jesus Christ. But, Lutheran Christians do not believe in the rapture. We do not believe the faithful will be raptured away leaving sinners behind to suffer flames. Instead, Lutherans believe in an "already and not yet" theology. Already, today, Christ returns in the announcement of forgiveness to sinners received in faith, in the promises announced in the water and word of Holy Baptism, and in his real presence in the bread and cup of the Holy Eucharist. Alive in the Word and Sacraments the faithful are then sent as the body of Christ into the world to proclaim God's love in our service, justice, and advocacy. This makes the focus of Christian life not on escaping the world and looking towards the end times, but on our neighbors and world right now who need the love and mercy of Christ.

[3] Third, the belief is rooted in an Americanized, contemporary, and hyper-macho Jesus who favors war, aggression, and force that is not the Jesus found in the Bible. The Jesus found in the Bible healed the centurion's daughter, taught his followers to pray for their enemies, and repudiated the Old Testament doctrine of an eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth.

The Jesus found in the Bible told his followers to put down their swords when they attempted to defend him from arrest in the garden of Gethsemane ... knelt before his disciples to wash their feet and commanded them to do likewise for each other ... and then willingly gave away his earthly power on the cross in order to proclaim the way of life.

There is nothing in the Bible that justifies an image of Jesus blessing the use of American missiles, bombs, and tanks as part of God's will. There is nothing in the Bible that suggests blessing upon United States Empire over, and at the expense of, any other country in the world. There is nothing in the Bible that suggests we effect the return of Christ by murdering our neighbors.

There is in the Bible, however, the repeated judgement of the prophets against Israel when the people of God forgot the plight of the orphan, widow, and immigrant. There is in the Bible the judgment of Jesus upon those judged goats who in their failure to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, cloth the naked, and visit the prisoners failed to serve Jesus himself found in these neighbors in need (Matthew 25). There is in the Bible the teaching of Paul that among the fruit of the Spirit is peace, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

On this Easter Sunday here's the truth: Jesus Christ lives! Jesus Christ defeated death by refusing to participate in the ways of sin, violence, and Empire. This good news of Christ is not a gift for, nor blessing on, one people or country at the expense of all others. Rather the life of Christ is God's gift of life poured out upon all peoples.

As a resurrection people, we are called to participate in the resurrection of Christ in acting and speaking life in places of death. Rather than senseless war, we are called to focused actions of costly solidarity, service and justice. Rather than supporting indiscriminate murder and death through war justified with ambiguous and changing claims, we are called to be the intentional hands and feet of Christ's love for all peoples of earth.

Because Christ lives today grace and mercy and forgiveness live today! Because Christ lives God's gift of unconditional mercy and grace received in faith through no works or merit of our own lives! Because Christ lives we live to freely spread Christ's mercy and grace in the world.

Friends, alive in Christ, be people of resurrection! Tell the story of Jesus, nurture relationships, and do racial justice for the life of the world.

Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia!

Bishop Piphon

## Emmaus Open Arms Team (EAOT)

The Emmaus Open Arms Team (EOAT) is ramping up our effort for 2026! As our committee begins its work, we are planning to undertake 4 projects in 2026:



### Inside Emmaus

Knowledge is power. As part of our work, we will add a brochure rack in the church and stock it with materials so members and visitors can learn more about what it means to be a Reconciling in Christ (RIC) congregation, and how we can support and welcome members of the LGBTQIA+ and immigrant communities to full participation within our church family.

### Bringing All Area Lutherans Together

We will organize and run one book group this fall and invite our fellow Lutherans in the greater Portland area to join. The first book, which has yet to be chosen, will be grounded in theology and focus on one of several areas: racial justice, bias in our lives and ministries, the history of the Church and inclusiveness, diversity and intercultural competence, and contemporary issues facing transgender youth, immigrants, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Whatever the final pick, it's sure to be thought-provoking and educational!



### Connecting with a Local Immigrant Nonprofit

Churches can play a vital role in supporting local immigrant groups by providing resources and advocacy as well as fostering integration within the Lutheran church and the community at large. One of our projects is to make this connection not only to see what we can provide to meet the needs of immigrant families, but also as a learning and growth opportunity for our congregation and a chance to advocate for change on behalf of immigrants.

### Continued Participation in the Portland Pride Parade

Last year marked our inaugural year of demonstrating our support in such a prominent manner. On June 20th, 2026, we will once again participate in the Pride Parade and extend an invitation to local Lutheran churches to join us for the day.



Next meeting is May 6<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 p.m. on Zoom. For more information contact: Judy Katzel (email: [jkatzell@gmail.com](mailto:jkatzell@gmail.com) or cell: 207-838-0725)

# May

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				Pr Gail Vacation	1	2 Yard Sale 8am-1pm
3 Worship 9am Brunch	4	5	6 EAOT Meeting 3pm	7	8	9
10 Worship 9am	11	12 Finance & Council Meeting 6pm	13	14	15	16
17 Worship 9am	18	19	20	21	22	23
24 Worship 9am	25	26 Spring Clean-up Day 8am-12pm	27	28	29	30
31 Worship 9am						

## Tech for Worship: Join the Team!

We are looking for additional help with our A/V operations for our Sunday Worship. Don't let the name scare you! You don't need to be an expert or a "techie" to help out. If you can use a tablet, you already have the skills we need. If you are interested, let Pastor Gail know!



## Spring Cleaning Day

Spring Clean-up Day will be on Saturday, May 26th from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. We will be doing cleaning inside and outside of the church.

### Ushers Needed!

The Worship and Music Team is looking for volunteers to serve as Ushers! You'll partner with a Safety Usher each Sunday to be a friendly face for our community, greeting guests and assisting where needed. Ready to help? Sign up in the Narthex today. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Sandy Halverson directly via email or text.

## Brunch for All

BRUNCH FOR ALL will be served on the first Sunday of the month, May 3rd. We have decided to switch from serving breakfast before worship to serving brunch after worship in order to bolster the attendance. Plan to stay for Coffee Hour and brunch and enjoy a hot breakfast in fellowship and thanksgiving. A sign-up sheet is located in the narthex.

### Did you know we have a Facebook page?

It's a great way to stay connected and informed about everything happening in our congregation. From event photos to special announcements, our page is filled with engaging content that celebrates our vibrant community. Join us online and be a part of our digital family!



@emmauslutheranchurch

(207) 781-4820



EMMAUSFALMOUTH.ORG



@EMMAUSLUTHERANCHURCH



265 MIDDLE ROAD, FALMOUTH, ME 04105