



The Global Church and COVID-19: Perspectives on Being Church Together

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The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, which means “the gathering.” In a confessional Lutheran understanding, a “gathering” becomes a church when those who gather do so in order to speak the gospel to one another and share sacraments as means of God’s grace.¹ In his 1539 work *On the Councils and the Church*, Luther reflected that this holy gathering can be identified by various marks, including sharing the meal and participating in corporate prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.² So what does it mean when the very marks of the *ekklesia* are vectors for COVID-19? What does it mean to be the gathering when we cannot gather? This question has caused a great deal of lament. However, it has also inspired creative innovation and reflection on being the church in a time of global pandemic. In this article, we will highlight perspectives from around the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The insights are gathered from a global survey conducted among the 148

¹ *Augsburg Confession*, Articles VII and VIII.

² Martin Luther, *On the Councils and the Church* (1539), in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Boyd Brown, 75 vols. (Philadelphia and St. Louis: Fortress and Concordia, 1955–), 51:143–78.

This pandemic is a global occurrence, something we tend to forget amid our local concerns and preoccupations. This article focuses on the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation, and on our Christian sisters and brothers.

member churches of the LWF, stories from local churches, and theological reflection gleaned through the experience of accompanying churches during the course of 2020.

At the outset, this article must be qualified with the knowledge that any reflection on the church and COVID-19 at this point will be provisional at best. It may not be possible to say anything conclusive while we are in the midst of the contingencies and complexities of an evolving global event. All manner of cultural, sociological, environmental, and behavioral factors affect our capacity to anticipate epidemiological trends, and to respond to the economic, political, ecological, and social impacts that influence the lives of churches and the realities experienced at the local level of parishes and families. For that reason, this article should be considered as a situational analysis. These insights from around the globe reflect this point in our experience.

Analysis is also situational because, while we experience the same pandemic, policies of social and physical distancing leave many people and communities extremely isolated for different reasons and with different effects. While some consequences of the pandemic seem to be globally consistent, such as a 30 percent rise in domestic and gender-based violence, according to studies by UN Women, other medical, sociological, mental health, and economic consequences are irregular.³ Access to economic, technological, and social sources of resilience are unjustly asymmetrical according to gender, race, and geographical location. This means any single experience of a church within the LWF may not be universally meaningful, and global trends may be far removed from a particular church's or parish's experience. However, interpreting local church experience in light of the larger perspective of belonging to a global communion offers hermeneutical help and hope.

During a global pandemic, trans-contextual interaction creates a positive feedback loop in terms of transmission of the virus. Therefore, travel is prohibited. But trans-contextual theological reflection as a global communion of churches creates a positive feedback loop in terms of building our capacity to find sources of resilience through the solidarity of belonging to a shared faith tradition that reaches beyond regional cultural and national borders. In the best of times, trans-contextual reflection is an interpretive cycle that keeps our doctrinal concepts rooted in lived experience, and prevents local contextual theologies from being domesticated or exploited. In a time of global pandemic, trans-contextual reflection can be liberating. While our experience of the pandemic is isolating, our experience of solidarity through communion can be reconciling. We hope experiences from around the LWF add perspective to our reflection about being the church in times of COVID-19.

We will point to some theological, diaconal, liturgical, and pastoral experiences, and will conclude by offering thoughts on Lutheran ethics that seem to

³ UN Women, *COVID-19 and Ending Violence against Women and Girls* (New York: UN Women, 2020), <https://tinyurl.com/1adt3leu>.

resonate across the communion during this time. Theological reflections derived from the Christian faith and the Lutheran tradition regarding love and liberty have served our communion in previous times of pandemic, and remain a source of resilience “for just such a time as this” (Esth 4:14).

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A SURVEY OF CHURCHES IN THIS TIME OF CRISIS: OLD WINE IN NEW WINESKINS

In the spring of 2020, the LWF launched a nonscientific survey of its member churches.⁴ Sixty-two churches responded. One hundred percent of these churches reported engaging in direct COVID-19 responses. The nature of the work varied across the seven regions. Over 50 percent were engaged in advocating issues related to impacts of COVID-19. Over 90 percent were engaged in creating new modalities (online or otherwise) for worship or ministry. Over 80 percent were engaged in campaigns to raise awareness or sensitization to information regarding COVID-19. Over 95 percent were engaged in pastoral care or counseling related to COVID-19. Over 95 percent were engaged in diaconal or humanitarian aid including clinics or hospitals that administered direct care for COVID-19 patients. The numbers are inspiring, and so are the stories that they represent. During this pandemic, Lutheran churches have been faithful actors within ecclesial spaces and public spaces.

We celebrate this positive engagement, because in many places around the globe churches have played negative roles. In some cases, communities of faith have resisted public health guidelines to restrict assemblies based on freedom of religion or belief. In some cases, resistance to public health guidelines is due to prior negative experiences, including a lack of coordination between church leadership and the public health or governmental sectors, or the vacuum that is created when people’s ways of life are altered without offering guidelines for new practices. For whatever reason, many Christian churches have continued old practices and have become super-spreaders. However, with some exceptions, most LWF member churches report following state or municipal guidelines restricting assembly.

⁴ This survey was launched by the Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting unit of the LWF Department of Theology, Mission and Justice, in coordination with Regional Secretaries.

Several report going beyond governmental guidelines in order to make a positive contribution to promoting public health.

This self-limiting response to public health guidelines was not without costs. The main challenges reported by responding churches are related to maintaining relationships among church members, the financial impact of not having regular assemblies for worship or fellowship (exacerbated by the loss of work among members), a gap in management skills related to new modalities of church life, and the relationship between the church and governments. Despite these challenges, the LWF and its member churches are striving to maintain their commitment to being faithful, cooperative actors in the public space. The contemporary Lutheran communion continues to express the baptismal calling to engage in public ministry, which demands particular expressions during times of crisis.⁵

In the recent past, Lutheran churches have demonstrated the positive role that religious leaders and churches or congregations provide as a link between governments and local communities. In the midst of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, polio, and the Ebola epidemic, Lutheran churches engaged with global and national health bodies to spread information and education for positive behavioral change. Churches provided specialized health facilities that created direct partnerships between faith communities and public health systems. The LWF continues this kind of care during the COVID-19 crisis among member churches in their communities worldwide. Some of these responses were supported through the LWF COVID-19 Rapid Response Fund that was in place from June to October 2020, which funds small projects geared toward various initiatives to mitigate effects of COVID-19. At the end of 2020, the LWF implemented a second round of LWF-RRF to alleviate persistent effects of the pandemic. The Lutheran tradition of engaging in the public sphere in times of need is notable. However, it is equally instructive to note the categories into which the churches' faithful responses coalesce.

The book of Acts records various descriptions of the life of the early Christian church. Their communion (*koinonia*) was marked by sharing wealth in common in order to redistribute it to those in need of healing and feeding (*diaconia*), common prayer and proclamation (*kerygma*) during worship (*leiturgia*), as well as public witness to the faith and the social implications of this good news (*martyria*). According to the LWF survey, the primary areas of COVID-19 response fall into these same categories of fellowship (*koinonia*), diaconal service and humanitarian response (*diaconia*), proclamation and liturgy (*kerygma* and *leiturgia*), and advocacy (*martyria*).

The LWF's collective response to this pandemic corresponds to the nature and purpose of the church's *koinonia* since the beginning. The church and the baptized have expressed this baptismal vocation in times of war, famine, persecution, and pestilence throughout its history. COVID-19 demands that we find creative

⁵ The Lutheran World Federation, *The Church in the Public Space: A Study Document of the Lutheran World Federation*, (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2016), 17, <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-church-public-space>.

and innovative ways to respond to this particular crisis of our time. But the grace that comes from faith that we receive in the church's *koinonia* has equipped us to once again translate the mission of God's love in Christ Jesus through proclamation and prophetic *diakonia* in loving service to our neighbor.⁶ In other words, the sustained response on the part of LWF churches is old wine in new wineskins.

So, let us briefly explore some of the diaconal, theological, liturgical, and pastoral responses.

DIACONAL RESPONSES

The diaconal response of the churches has been sustained and concerted. The LWF is providing dozens of grants to member churches through the COVID-19 Rapid Response Fund. Member churches have implemented public health programs and served as direct health care providers through clinics and participation in community health systems. Churches have faithfully continued their efforts to educate, feed the hungry, provide housing, care for the elderly and children, provide education, and advocate for the rights and dignity of the most vulnerable during these days of restricted movement, including refugees and internally displaced people.

Lutheran churches in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and Central Eastern Europe have utilized funds according to their context. For example, in the Africa region, churches in the DRC, Zambia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Namibia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Madagascar have implemented educational programs through church-run radio stations, launched programs for schoolchildren, and distributed information at borders where traders cross into new regions. This focused and sustained engagement with human suffering has given new expressions to familiar theological questions regarding suffering.

THEOLOGICAL RESPONSES

One response from an LWF member church in the Central and Western Europe Region suggested that many churches are actively struggling to understand God's action during the pandemic. This question is usually referred to as theodicy. How do we understand the presence of pain or suffering in the world if we profess faith in a good God who is love? It is not an understatement to say that this perceived problem lies at the heart of theological enquiry in every faith tradition, including Buddhism, Indigenous traditions, Judaism, Christianity, and the philosophical traditions from Plato, Plotinus, Augustine, Leibniz, Hume, and more. This question preoccupied theologians in the wake of World War II, along with the likes of Hannah Arendt and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.

⁶ The Lutheran World Federation, *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment* (Geneva: Lutheran World Foundation, 2009), <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-diakonia-context-transformation-reconciliation-empowerment>.

We cannot explore this in depth here because there are simply too many entry points to this conversation. The experiences of suffering are so diverse and complex that particular conversations are best sustained within a pastoral relationship or an affected community that can provide context and accompaniment. But generally speaking, Lutherans do not tend to view suffering as a theological problem to be solved. Theologically, Lutherans tend to respond to suffering through the lens of the theology of the cross. Simply put, suffering is not judgment on the victim or their relationship to God. Suffering does not come from God, and natural suffering is part of our human condition. As Luther proposed in his *Heidelberg Disputation*, in terms of knowledge of God, the cross reminds us that God is present in suffering. Even if we suffer, we are not forsaken. No creature suffers alone, and no creature dies alone. God not only suffers with us, but is present, comforting us as we move to healing or new life.

While this message about “natural” suffering may be comforting in times of natural disaster, disease, or pandemic, we must always hold this affirmation in dialectical tension with the rejoinder that suffering that results from injustice is never to be tolerated. Unlike diseases that are accidental to our created nature, the kinds of suffering that results from social and political oppression, ecological destruction, racism, and domestic or gender-based violence are the direct result of sin. They must never be tolerated or spiritualized and must be transformed. Therefore, the theology of the cross requires a bifocal approach to preaching and teaching about suffering in the midst of pandemic.

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With one eye on the cross, the church affirms the hopeful presence of God in times of pandemic, particularly when we are not able to be physically present with loved ones as they suffer or die from the virus. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, as Paul affirms in Romans 8:38–39. At the same time, with one eye on the resurrection, the church condemns violent, exploitative, and discriminatory practices that have been unmasked by the pressures of this pandemic, such as domestic violence, hunger, and health care disparities based on race, caste, gender, or other protected classes. This theological approach to suffering allows us to hold pain and hope, joy and justice in one space. Rather than needing to solve a perceived problem of suffering, we are free to participate in healing, which is God’s proper work.

The good news of God’s loving presence should be a key factor in preaching. The good news should comfort the hearts of the faithful and compel them to transformative, loving, hopeful action. Some churches, particularly in Africa and Asia,

report this as a particular challenge. They report the influence of theologies that interpret the pandemic in terms of the end times. In these cases, we refer churches to the full meaning of *apocalypse*, which is “to reveal.” The pandemic reveals the reality of human suffering and injustice. But this revelation of the way things are is no commentary about what is to come. On the contrary, the resurrection of Christ reveals the reality of abundant life for all that is already our future. Our trust in that future compels us to participate in the reformation and transformation of injustice and suffering today.

Word and sacrament are for us the in-breaking of this future into our present, for which Jesus taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10). While we are not currently able to share this meal, our previous experience of this sacramental in-breaking is an object of faith, by which we continue to live in that hope-filled reality in this time of separation. This eschatological focus has kerygmatic implications, and several regions report the need for theological reflection and guidance for those engaged in the ministry of the Word.

LITURGICAL RESPONSES

In addition to kerygmatic implications, churches have faced acute liturgical questions. As mentioned above, most LWF member churches report following state or municipal guidelines restricting assembly, and some have gone beyond governmental restrictions in order to make a positive contribution to public health. Most member churches quickly innovated new modalities of meeting for worship and prayer, either in outdoor, socially distanced ways or in digitally mediated, online formats.

Obvious disparities have arisen in this modal shift. Member churches in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) report a twofold problem of the high cost of internet services and limited infrastructure that prevent many communities from “gathering” online. This is also the case in parts of the globe that do not face these particular challenges, yet populations such as the elderly, children, and disadvantaged or marginalized groups cannot access digital spaces.

A sense of liturgical crisis arose as global lockdowns and sheltering orders came into force at the start of the Lent/Easter seasons. The prospect of not being able to celebrate the central feast day of the church year in the traditional way devastated millions of Christians. The LWF responded, as did many member churches, with resources for remote, at-home, or online Triduum and Easter liturgies. Most of these were liturgies of the Word, because we could not gather for Holy Communion. The feeling of liturgical crisis seems to have abated, and member churches adjusted to the Advent and Christmas season much more adeptly. Member churches are approaching the practicalities of remote, at-home, or online worship with creativity to overcome the practical difficulties of not being able to assemble for worship.

However, churches did not only report practical problems with online worship. For example, churches in LAC called for more theological reflection on these shifting modalities of worship. In light of the fact that singing in close proximity and sharing food were particular vectors for transmitting COVID-19, even where small gatherings for worship were permitted singing and sharing communion were prohibited or discouraged. While home worship or digital spaces provided a retreat for corporate prayer, many church leaders found themselves in divisive debates about online worship.

Sometimes these debates took the form of discussions about ministry and order, specifically when and to what extent churches would authorize lay members to preside over home communion. But often the debates revolved around the question of the real presence of Christ in liturgies being held online or via radio broadcast.

On the one hand, Luther reminds us in his *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* that all creation exists within the replete presence of God.⁷ Therefore, as suggested in his treatise on *The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics*, God is present in and behind the masks of all creation.⁸ For this reason, the weekly prayer resource that the LWF prepared for member churches throughout 2020 recalls the following comforting advice from Luther's *A Simple Way to Pray*:

Never think that you are kneeling or standing alone, rather think that the whole of Christendom . . . are standing there beside you and you are standing among them in a common, united petition which God cannot disdain. . . . there we can find God the Creator, God the Redeemer, God the Holy Spirit, that is, Him who daily sanctifies us.⁹

However, the Large Catechism clearly teaches that, with respect to the sacraments, the spoken Word clings to an external sign—either word, water, bread, or wine. Article 7 of the *Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord* purports that the integrity of the sacrament depends on the words and the elements being joined in the midst of a gathering.¹⁰ This implies that the Words of Institution themselves do not make the sacrament efficacious, whether they are spoken in person or mediated digitally. Rather, the assembled community of faith in which the Word clings and is active constitutes a sacrament. However, what constitutes an assembled communion? Is not a digitally mediated community real as opposed to virtual, which are merely avatars or representations of reality?¹¹ Moreover, to what extent can confessions that were meant to honor the dignity of bodily manifestations of

⁷ Martin Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, in *Luther's Works* 37:161–372.

⁸ Martin Luther, *The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics*, in *LW* 36:331–361.

⁹ Martin Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray*, in *LW* 43:189–213.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord*, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 568–591.

¹¹ This issue of the real presence of Christ and digital mediation was explored by Deanna A. Thompson, *The Virtual Body of Christ in a Suffering World* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2016).

the church be interpreted to meet the needs of bodies who are medically restricted from gathering in space, but can gather digitally in time?

These questions of real presence, assembly, time, space, and digital mediation demand more theological reflection. Consultations will be coordinated in the near future, specifically with respect to the sacraments of Holy Communion and Holy Baptism. This trans-contextual reflection builds on the contributions of theologians and member churches who, for the most part, have responded with deep pastoral sensitivity.

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For example, in Africa, the Northeastern Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (NELCSA) authorized a home-based liturgy for Holy Communion. This liturgy came with didactic explanations rooted in the practices of the early church, where worship would have been conducted in households. The liturgy guided a family member, who was most often not ordained, to preside over Holy Communion. Such an example helped the Christians engage in discussions about the meaning and practice of worship throughout history. As other member churches engage in theological discussions about liturgy and sacraments during exceptional times, it will be helpful to learn from the pastoral experience of churches such as NELCSA. These pastoral responses to liturgical questions are mirrored in the creative responses to pastoral ministry in general.

PASTORAL CARE AND FELLOWSHIP

The question of pastoral care and fellowship has preoccupied the lives of most church leaders and Christians during this pandemic. Questions about suffering, pastoral visits, counseling, loss and grief, mourning rituals, and closures will continue long after the acute effects of the pandemic subside. Hence, we encourage churches to sustain theological reflection in these areas.

Member churches across the communion report that they have devoted an enormous amount of time and energy to prayer with and pastoral care to the terminally ill and dying, or to conducting funerals of members and accompanying the bereaved. Churches adapted liturgies especially for these circumstances. We have also seen how the ministry of all the baptized (clergy and lay) according to their gifts has been encouraged. The call to continue equipping all baptized members of the church for ministry is critical and provides an example of our Lutheran tradition in action. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul reflects on the diversity

of gifts offered to Christians according to the Holy Spirit and the need to discern those gifts for specific ministries. In times such as this, we see how the diversity of gifts among a congregation's members are integral parts of its pastoral-care ministry. Most responses to the LWF survey demonstrated this reality, but churches in Central and Eastern Europe specifically highlighted their emphasis on creatively continuing pastoral care during lockdown.

For example, while pastors and lay leaders were offering online pastoral ministries such as prayers and counseling, congregations and neighborhood groups established systems of care, including feeding and hotline calls for help to those in need. As such, the whole body of Christ has participated in the ministry by utilizing their gifts in service to the other.

LIBERTY AND LOVE: RESILIENCE “FOR JUST SUCH A TIME AS THIS”

In this article, we have only been able to point to some of the myriad examples of creative, innovative, and sustained responses and reflections member churches across the LWF reported. There are thousands more stories that would require a library to catalog. While this year has presented an acute challenge that may be unprecedented for the LWF in its global scope, the LWF continues to show deep solidarity and concerted ministry that befits a communion of churches. In light of the experience to this point, the survey asked member churches to report on their future priorities. The list includes adapting to new forms of being church, diakonia and pastoral care, management and leadership capacity building, church sustainability, unity and Lutheran identity, public voice, and issues of justice including gender, ecological, and human rights. It is no surprise that these future directions also follow the basic contours of those original aspects of the church's ministry: *koinonia*, *diakonia*, *leiturgia*, *martyria*.

This consistent, holistic response is significant. It reminds us that the communion of saints continues to be a source of resilience. Regardless of the exigencies of external pressures that constrain or necessitate contingent modalities of ministry, the church will be the church, because it is kept with Christ in faith by the Holy Spirit who continues to sustain and renew the earth. This witness of God's faithful people in all times and places has entrusted this apostolic seed to us. In the past, the church has experienced exile from all that they knew. The church has been forcibly displaced, oppressed, and denied the right to worship as they wished. Plague and pestilence have disbanded the faithful in generations past, and many in our congregations have been precluded from fellowship today, prior to this pandemic, due to chronic illnesses or compromised immunities. Yet through all of this, the Holy Trinity always finds God's people and calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us. This gracious divine initiative is the source of resilience.

In exile, God's people sat down and wept by the waters of Babylon because they, too, were separated from all the familiar markers and liturgical practices of their faith. Even there, faith persisted in the stories, the songs, and the worship, and

God's real and active presence sustained the faith of God's people and provided them with new insights to meet their moment. As Queen Esther was prepared by the long-suffering and patient presence of faith through years of persecution "for just such a time as this," the responses across the communion are signs that the means of grace and the richness of our tradition equip us for this moment. Even disagreements in theological reflection reveal a deep yearning to express how the common touchstones of our Lutheran heritage guide us for a time such as this. We conclude by highlighting two in particular.

Christian liberty is one of the organizing principles of the Lutheran tradition. In his treatise on the *Freedom of a Christian*, Luther interprets this notion as a paradox. A Christian is perfectly free, subject to none, and yet perfectly bound to serve all. This ethic has been revealed in bold strokes across our communion. Public health policies dictated that we could not gather in congregational assemblies, sometimes not in groups of more than a few people. Even where regulations were initially met with suspicion (particularly in countries where Christians are under pressure as a religious minority), the communion quickly shifted the narrative. Pastoral letters and theological writings were helpful in reframing these regulations according to this ethic. Rather than viewing policies as a restriction on religious liberty, this was an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to true Christian freedom. Christians are free to abstain from exercising individual liberties for the sake of caring for our neighbor. Not assembling became a sign of our love for and concern to protect our neighbor from transmission. Reflecting Luther's own advice to clergy serving during the time of the plague in sixteenth-century Germany, our loss with respect to worship became a sign of trust.¹² Making informed decisions based on reasoned counsel among neighbors who are scientists, government officials, and health care workers demonstrates trust in relationships and the diversity of God's gifts for abundant life. Suspending personal liberties to show compassion and care for the most vulnerable in our midst is a sign of faith in the providence of God who is love. Love is a defining feature of any Lutheran ethic.

Lutherans profess that we are justified by grace through faith. This means, of course, that we are free from the need to merit our own salvation through good works. But rather than being freed by love from doing good works, we are free to do good works that demonstrate love beyond the compulsion of any law. Our relationship to God (*coram Deo*) who is love frees us to do that which is loving for our neighbor in the world (*coram mundo*). This means we are also free from any religious requirements, if abstaining is the most compassionate way to love our neighbor. If our religious practices put our neighbors' lives at risk, then God's love frees us from any religious exigencies to embody loving relationships. As expressed in the words of Everist and Nesson, "This is what God desires for God's people: trusting, life-giving relationships with God and with one another so that

¹² Martin Luther, *Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague*, in LW 43:119–138.

together we might serve in transformative ways in a world hungering for God's unconditional love."¹³

Of course, it causes us great pain to be separated from the meaning-making and grace-communicating rituals of our faith. Separation from the land and from contextual sources of meaning-making is one of the disempowering and disorienting consequences of colonialism.¹⁴ But in the context of the global pandemic, does it not change our experience of separation if we know that in this season, we are not merely forced to make that choice according to legal compulsion? Surely, it gladdens our hearts to know that we are empowered to make that choice because in so doing we care for our neighbor in a way that reveals the compassionate love of God that was revealed in Christ Jesus.

So, in conclusion, while our particular, local experiences of this global pandemic may be very different, we are blessed to be in solidarity with the universal church of Christ, rooted in the full communion of churches that is the Lutheran World Federation. We will continue to wrestle with the theological and practical questions regarding new modalities of being the church in times of COVID-19 in the short term. And we will continue into the medium and long term to deal with the justice issues related to building back better economies, ecologies, health care systems, and political, labor, and ecclesial structures. But as we do, we hope that this article has provided a hopeful touchstone that we are doing it as a global communion of churches whose sources of resilience come from a never-failing fount that spans space and time.

To close with one more response from a member church from the LAC region, the aim of our shared witness in the midst of COVID-19, as in all times, is to "keep hope alive." ⊕

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¹³ Norma Cook Everist and Craig L. Nesson, *Transforming Leadership: New Vision for a Church in Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 2.

¹⁴ Larry Rasmussen discusses this issue of colonialism, alienation from the land and the moral implications regarding meaning-making, in *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 210–213.