



Lower Susquehanna Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

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Miguel Agustín Pro, martyr, died 1927

Dear Partners in Ministry:

I want to share some thoughts with you as we anticipate the first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of our church year and a season of waiting.

In Luke's gospel this year we will hear stories leading up to the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus. We will accompany Mary on her solo journey to see her cousin Elizabeth. Like Elizabeth, we will sense in Mary's presence a blessing from God. And we will add our voices to Mary's as she responds in the song of praise that we call *The Magnificat*:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. . . . He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Mary and Elizabeth are waiting. They are waiting for the birth of miraculously unexpected sons, but they are waiting for something much more. They are waiting for the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah. And Mary knows this will happen in a way that people do not expect. We hear it in her song: He has brought down the powerful, filled the hungry with good things, and lifted up the lowly.

The coming of the Messiah literally turns the world and its ideas upside down. In an unexpected time, in an unexpected way, and in an unexpected place, Immanuel-God with us-will appear. And people who have suffered under an oppressive system are promised freedom and release, are promised justice and mercy.

Fast-forward 2,000 years, where we too are waiting. Yes, we are waiting for the celebration of Jesus' birth-God with us. Yet many in our world are also waiting for and hungering for justice and mercy. People of color are waiting for and hungry for racial justice. People in poverty are waiting for and hungry for economic justice. People who are homeless are waiting for and hungry for shelter. And people in prisons are waiting for and hungry for freedom and a chance to start their lives over.

In the coming year our synod will focus on the theme Hunger for Justice and Mercy. One of the ways we plan to do that is through a meal-packaging event at our Synod Assembly, June 3-5. We are calling this event "Hunger J.A.M." (Hunger for Justice and Mercy), and we plan to pack 400,000 meals for the hungry around us. I am hopeful that each congregation in our synod will take the opportunity to participate in this effort to help the hungry.

In this season of waiting, we wait for the coming of Christ. Many of our sisters and brothers in the world also wait for the good news of Christ's coming that we bring as people of God. They wait for the good news that Christ will, through our church and our hands, turn the world upside down. They wait for the good news that the Holy Spirit is working through God's church to reach them in their suffering. My prayer in this season of Advent is that we may be led by the Spirit to find new ways to bring justice and mercy throughout the church.

On behalf of our synod staff, I want to wish you an expectant Advent and a joyous Christmas.

Yours in Christ,

†James S. Dunlop, bishop