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# Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

the little church with a big heart!

## THOUGHTS ALONG THE WAY...

In the year 165, Roman soldiers returning from their victory over the Parthians brought an unwelcome guest home with them. As they battled the Parthians and camped in the borderlands, many of them contracted a highly contagious and lethal virus. It began to decimate their ranks as they marched homeward. The disease was probably smallpox and it spread through the empire like wildfire. It claimed the life of the emperor, Lucius Verus, in 169. His co-regent, Marcus Aurelius also contracted the disease but survived.

That first Roman pandemic came to be known as the Antonine Plague and it lasted the better part of 20 years, sweeping across the empire in surges and waves. Medical historians think there were at least two variants of the virus. At its height, it is estimated that the plague was causing 5,000 deaths a day. When it broke out again in 189, Cassius Dio documented a death toll of 2,000 a day. Over a 23 year period, the Antonine plague claimed somewhere between 7 and 10 percent of the entire population. In the army and in the densely packed cities, the rate was between 13 and 15 percent. Cassius Dio wrote that caravans of carts loaded with bodies could be seen leaving the city every day, taking the dead to the countryside for burial or burning.

Needless to say, a plague with such a devastating mortality rate had a tremendous impact on every aspect of life in the Roman world. Civic building projects, one of the primary engines of the Roman economy, came to a complete halt between 166 and 180. On the other hand, Marcus Aurelius, in an effort to curry favor with the gods, sank enormous amounts of money into rebuilding and refurbishing the temples and monuments of the pagan deities of Rome. On the whole, though, the empire's economy tanked. People avoided crowds. Marketplaces languished. Supply systems became disrupted and often there would be shortages of food and other goods. There was a chronic shortage of workers, even slaves. The mortality rate was so high in the army that Marcus Aurelius ordered the drafting of slaves and gladiators to fill the ranks. Since the plague didn't spare Patricians, their numbers thinned so much that the emperor decreed that the sons of freed slaves could fill administrative positions that had previously been reserved for the higher born.

Christian communities changed, too. For one thing, they began to grow in size at a steady pace. People living in fear and confronted by mortality were much more ready to consider options in their understanding of divine things. People also noticed that the Christians cared for each other when illness struck. That was an attractive feature in an empire with no official provision for health care. As they grew, the Christian communities became better organized and more cohesive. Communication between communities increased as elders and

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Thoughts Along the Way Continues...

bishops wrote to other elders and bishops about church practice and understanding of scriptures. Infant and child baptism, which had been rare, became more common and widespread as anxious parents sought to ensure the eternal well-being of their children.

The Antonine Plague changed everything in the Roman world. As it dragged on, year after year, wave after wave, surge after surge people wondered if things would ever go back to the way they had been before. And while things did eventually return to something more like normal, too many things had changed for their world to ever again be what it had been before the plague.

Structures and functions of government had changed. The military had changed. The status of many people had changed. Commerce had changed. Christianity was more present, stronger, and more well-represented in the social mix of the empire. None of these changes could have been imagined when the virus first marched in Rome with the homecoming soldiers.

In this third year of our pandemic with Covid 19, I think it's important to take stock of how this virus has changed us. I think it's important for us to make note of how living in a pandemic has changed our economy, changed our politics, changed out basic institutions, and challenged our infrastructure and supply chains. Those things all affect us, and not just in practical ways. Those changes can have a profound effect on how we understand our lives and how we live them.

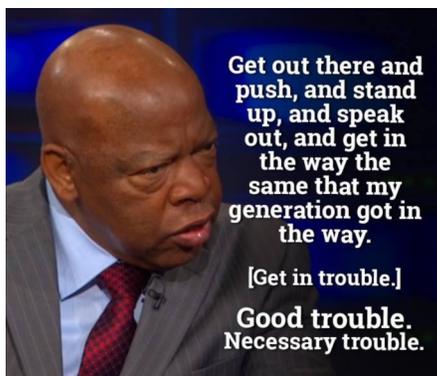
It's also important to assess the impact that Covid has had on us psychologically and spiritually. Especially spiritually. How has it changed us? How has it changed the way we respond to news and truth we don't want to hear? This virus has taken the lives of more than 860,000 of us in the U.S. alone. How has it changed the way we value—or don't value—life, especially the lives of others, the lives of people we don't know or are not close to?

In describing the meaning of the commandment You Shall Not Kill, Martin Luther wrote this: "We are to fear and love God, so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, but instead help and support them in all of life's needs." How are we doing with that? In a time of pandemic when some rebel against the simple measures of wearing a mask properly, getting vaccinated, and avoiding in-person gatherings in enclosed spaces, I think we need to take Luther's understanding more to heart. Are we doing everything we can so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors? On some future day when the Covid pandemic is over, what will we think of the way we handled ourselves and our relationships in our own time of plague?

Pro Gloria Dei, Pastor Steve



**LET JUSTICE ROLL ON LIKE A RIVER, RIGHTEOUSNESS LIKE A NEVER-FAILING STREAM ! ~ AMOS 5:24**



**WHERE DO YOU SENSE THE HOLY SPIRIT MIGHT BE PROMPTNG YOU TO MAKE SOME GOOD TROUBLE?**

**HOW CAN YOU DISCERN THE GODLY WAY TO DO JUST THAT?**



## COUNCIL MESSAGE

Just one short month ago we were celebrating Christmas in our beautiful sanctuary and now we're still together but separated again! Not what we hoped for as we started the new year but Council decided to weigh-in on the side of caution and have worship conducted online until this Omicron surge is behind us. We're now up to 17 out of the last 24 months of worship online and yet we still have so many opportunities to be together because of the technological talents of Bob Seimer, the flexibility of our music director Richard Hoover and the leadership of Pastor Steve. We are so thankful for them!

We have been so fortunate to have a variety of ways to be together over these many months including Wednesday and Sunday morning adult education as well as our worship services each week, whether in person or online. A bonus to our online worship is the fellowship time we spend together catching up and visiting with one another following worship. Our online worship and adult education have also provided others in different cities and even countries the opportunity to participate. We look forward to being together in person again soon and we are grateful to have worship and adult education as an online option for those that are unable to be with us physically.

Thank you for participating in our Annual Congregational Meeting in January as we approved our Spending Plan for 2022. We have now successfully conducted the last 3 Congregational meetings online! Let's hope that our meeting in May will be in person (with online as an option) followed by our traditional luncheon.

Please remember to continue to send in your tithes and offerings either through the mail or online on our website ([www.gdlclb.org](http://www.gdlclb.org)). Your offerings cover the ongoing expenses of maintaining our church. Your offerings and gifts are also important to our Mission partners too. Trips to our mission partners (LSS and Fe Y Esperanza) are being made regularly. Their need for food, clothing, hygiene items and gently used household items continue especially during these difficult times. Items can be brought to church and placed in either the area for LSS and/or Fe Y Esperanza. If you are unable to bring them to church, please call me (562-225-7405) or Sandy Nelson at the church office, and we'll arrange to have them picked up at your home.

The members of the Church Council will be assessing the CDC recommendations and reviewing the Omicron case numbers in Long Beach and deciding on when it's safe to return to in-person worship. We want to provide a safe environment for all of our members and for our guests. This information will be communicated via email blasts and calls from your shepherds; we pray that it will be soon and this surge will be behind us once and for all.

In the meantime, stay together and continue to enjoy the many benefits of being a church family through prayer, calls, and cards of encouragement. February is a perfect month to remember each other at Gloria Dei, a little church with a big heart – Happy Valentine's Day to each of your big hearts!

**Karen Como**  
Council President

## 5 WAYS TO MAKE GRATITUDE A HABIT

A grateful attitude is good medicine. However, the busyness of life, financial issues and work can distract us from all that we have to be thankful for. As humans, we have a tendency to focus on troubles and not on blessings, but there are practical things we can do to help boost our gratitude.

### 1) Start the Day by Making Gratitude Your Attitude

When we wake up each day, we have the choice to have a grateful mindset and spirit. Begin each day by stating what you are grateful for and be thankful in prayer. In doing so, we can positively affect how we experience the rest of the day.

### 2) Say “Thanks” More Often

This one word has the power to uplift the attitude of the person you thank as well as your own. Let others know they are appreciated, and you’ll feel good, too, as a result. Say “thank you” to those who help you at work, your doctor, the supermarket staff and others.

### 3) Create a Gratitude Journal

Be intentional. Journal every day about the things, people, experiences, moments, events and meals you are grateful for. Over time you can look back and see the goodness of God in your life.

### 4) Be Uplifted by Others

Read stories or watch videos about people who have overcome great challenges

in their lives. These stories can help us realize that even in the worst of times we have a lot to be thankful for.

### 5) Spread Thanksgiving Throughout the Year

Enjoy a meal with people you are grateful to have in your life. Make it a positive practice of being with those who fill your heart with love and gratitude.

A wise person once said, “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.” It takes positive habits to ensure that we remain cheerful and grateful in the different seasons of our lives. If you have any tips on how to boost one’s gratitude, please share with others.

~ Post by Pablo Diaz in Positive Living

## POSITIVE STEPS TO HELP YOU AND YOUR FAMILY FEEL MORE CHEERFUL AND GRATEFUL ALL YEAR LONG — ESPECIALLY DURING THIS CHALLENGING PANDEMIC !

When it comes to improving your health and well-being, good intentions are a great start, but they’re often not enough. Healthy habits surface when we set ourselves up for success. The **Renew You Challenge** can help. The Challenge is the newest health and wellness experience from Renew by UnitedHealthcare® to help inspire individuals to take charge of their well-being every day.

Explore new ideas to help build up your body, mind and spirit.

Renew by UnitedHealthcare® provides health and wellness resources and activities to help people live healthier every day.

\*\* Check the website of your healthcare provider to learn more about similar resources!

**Lord, thank you for the gift of gratitude; help us to be intentional and develop practical habits to boost our gratitude quotient. Amen.**

# GLORIA DEI SPENDING PLAN



2021 FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT — Thank you for your continuing support of Gloria Dei. The past two years have been challenging in many ways and are reflected in 2021's financial statement. Expenses exceeded income by \$8,099 in 2021 and the total income of \$190,097 is \$53,778 lower than in 2017. Based on our projections, 2022 will see another drop in total income. To counter this reduction Church Council approved the **2022 Spending Plan** with a 51% decrease in giving to Synod and our Mission Partners. Although we tapped our reserves to cover 2021's deficit, they still remain adequate to cover any unexpected costs that may arise in 2022.

Thank you in advance for continuing to send your tithes via mail or online. A reminder that your offerings cover the cost associated with maintaining our church infrastructure. Your offerings and gifts are important to our church community—your support and contributions help Gloria Dei survive and thrive. Website: [www.gdclb.org](http://www.gdclb.org) ~ Gary Bockman, Treasurer



## LISTEN TO LPR

Download APP to listen on your iPhone or iPad.

**Study the Bible with the Church, Past and Present**

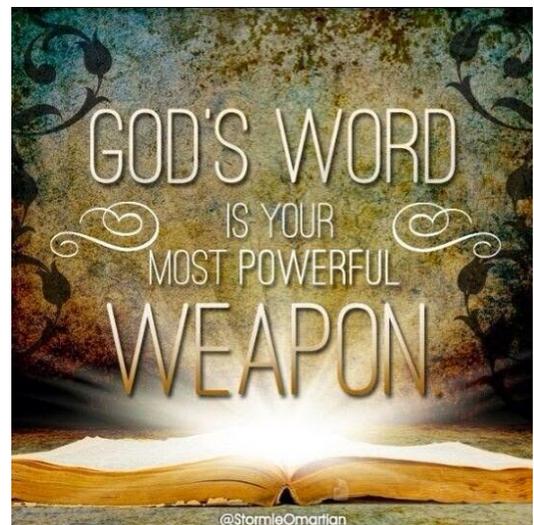


*The* **WORD** *of the* **LORD**  
ENDURES FOREVER

**A daily 15-minute verse-by-verse Bible study hosted by Pastor Will Weedon**

[thewordendures.org](http://thewordendures.org)

**Check out ELCA BIBLE STUDY! Daily Discipleship and Daily Faith Practices** are online downloadable Bible studies based on the lectionary used at Sunday worship. Daily Discipleship is based on the Gospel Lesson and Daily Faith Practices is based on the Second Lesson. They are available for each liturgical year. For example, Year A begins with the season of Advent in 2019, and is completed at the end of Time After Pentecost, 2020. Year B begins with the season of advent in 2020 and is completed at the end of Time After Pentecost, 2021. Year C begins with the season of Advent in 2021 and is completed at the end of Time After Pentecost in 2022. The liturgical seasons are Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost.



@StarmieOmarian

# THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF BEING KIND

Mind-body writer and organic chemist David Hamilton, Ph.D., outlines the key benefits of being kind in his book, *The Five Side Effects of Kindness*.

- ◆ **We feel happy** when we do something kind for someone. This is in part due to elevated levels of endorphins and dopamine, which lead to feel-good emotions.
- ◆ We also feel an emotional warmth during acts of kindness. These acts produce oxytocin in the brain and body, causing a release in nitric oxide in blood vessels. This dilates blood vessels and reduces blood pressure, in other words, **kindness is good for the heart** and considered cardio-protective.
- ◆ Research shows that oxytocin, also produced through emotional warmth, reduces levels of free radicals and inflammation in the cardiovascular system, **slowing the aging process**.
- ◆ **Kindness improves relationships** by reducing the emotional distance between people, resulting in tighter bonds. Thanks to our ancestors, we're wired to cooperate in order to survive and thrive.
- ◆ **Kindness is contagious**, and its ripple effect is well-documented. One study noted that an anonymous organ donor's decision to share a kidney resulted in other family members of recipients to donate their kidneys to others in need. In the end, 10 people received a new kidney because of that one anonymous donor.
- ◆ **Be kind to yourself.** You have access to many self-care tools via apps on your smartphone. Take advantage of daily mood trackers, meditations, coping tools,

**Self-compassion is just as important as the empathy we show others. Reflecting on our lives and resolving anything that makes it hard to feel deeply or sincerely for others is key.**

**GET STARTED: DOWNLOAD THE NEIBORHOOD KINDNESS CHALLENGE**  
— [randomactsofkindness.org](http://randomactsofkindness.org) —

## HOW MINDFULNESS HELPS EASE EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD

**Quarantine fatigue** is all about overload, says Anne Alexander, editor of *Mindful* magazine. "Our brains get tired of trying to manage so much alarming information," she explains. "Things we never had to think about before, we're suddenly thinking about constantly — Do I have my mask? Is that person standing too close to me at the store? Will there be another surge? It makes us mentally fatigued and we're left without the emotional bandwidth to manage our own moods."

**One way to cope: Mindfulness.** "It's a practice that helps us reframe our minds and shift our attention," says clinical psychologist Kerri Smedley, Ph.D. "It allows us to step back from all the uncertainties and all the scary stories our minds are telling us, and just focus on the moment."

# ANNOUNCEMENTS & HOLIDAYS

## We Are a Publicly Engaged Church

- AMMPARO
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- ELCAVotes
- Faith Science and Technology
- Justice for Women
- Justice Portal
- Lutheran Office for World Community
- Organizing for Mission
- Peace Not Walls
- Racial Justice Ministries
- Social Issues
- Volunteer Opportunities

Explore the ELCA website !

**PRESIDENT'S DAY  
HOLIDAY  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 21**

**1 — FULL MOON....**

**CHINESE NEW YEAR**

**12 — LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY**

**14 — VALENTINES DAY**

**22 — WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY**



## COMMIT TO SERVANTHOOD IN 2022

This is how much God loved the world: He gave His one and only son.

And this is why:

So that no one need be destroyed; by believing in Him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life.

~ John 3:16

## SEEK OUT CHURCH & COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER OPTIONS...

## GOD'S WORK OUR HANDS

We are co-workers in God's service. — 1 Corinthians 3:9



**CALL A FRIEND &  
FIND AN  
OPPORTUNITY TO  
SERVE !**

Life's most persistent and urgent question is, What are you doing for others?

~ Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning. Thank You for the sun by day and the moon and stars at night. Thank You for abundant gardens and fields. Thank You for so richly providing every need of body and soul. Thank You most of all for the gift of Your Son, our Lord and Savior, without whom no earthly blessings matter. Give us an ever-thankful heart. In Jesus' name. Amen

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY



2 —

Bob Siemer

5 —

Jayne Lane

David Thomas Fuller

18 —

Roger Powell

23 —

Lyn Hicks

24 —

Carrol Irwin

25 —

Sarah Fuller

27 —

## HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

1 —

David & Sarah Fuller

**GLORIA DEI EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH**

**5872 Naples Plaza  
Long Beach, California 90803**



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Gloria Dei Lutheran Church is a Reconciling in Christ Congregation. At Gloria Dei Lutheran Church we welcome all who are seeking God's love and grace. We welcome all because God welcomes all, regardless of race or culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, or relationship status. We welcome all without regard to the social, cultural or economic circumstances that too often divide us. Our unity is in Christ in whom we are all made new. (2 Corinthians. 5:17-19)

**MAY YOU OBSERVE the WORLD with LOVING CONSIDERATION.....**

