



**GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH**

***We are growing, making, nurturing disciples in Christ.***

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**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America - *God's Work, Our Hands***



March 11, 2021

Dear members of Good Shepherd,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

This Lent, I have been reflecting on what it means to dwell in the unknown. The forty days of this season echo the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, which in turn echoes the forty years of the Israelites' wilderness wanderings. In the stories of this season, scripture leads us to walk alongside people who do not always know where the path they follow is leading, only that God is guiding them. To dwell in the wilderness is to walk into discomfort and uncertainty, practicing faith in God's leading and hope for God's future.

With that wilderness in mind, and in both hope and grief, I write to share difficult news: I will leave my call as Good Shepherd's co-pastor at the beginning of this summer. My last Sunday with you will be June 6<sup>th</sup>.

This decision is not an easy one; it follows a prolonged period of discerning a call toward PhD studies in order to teach and help form future church leaders. I went through the process of applying to programs this year, and while it does not look at this point as though my applications have been successful this year, the process confirmed for me that this is the direction of God's leading. I will apply again next year, and in the meantime, though I love you and love the work of ministry, I am hungry for time with family and friends whom I have not seen in the past year.

While I recognize that our congregation will now face an unexpected time of discernment, Bishop Hazelwood and Pastor Sara Anderson are both aware of the support Good Shepherd will need, and they have committed to providing the resources that will be needed during this time to ensure the congregation has the pastoral support and guidance that will be so important in the coming months. Randy Koopman, our Council President has also enclosed a letter that provides details around next steps for the congregation. In addition, please know that my decision does not change Pastor Jeff's call to ordained ministry at Good Shepherd. He still feels called by God to serve in this place and has no intention of leaving at this time.

I want to thank you for the privilege of walking with you throughout these last three years. This congregation is a special place, and I have been deeply blessed to have served you. In the midst of transition, what I want most is for you to see the gifts that the Spirit has nurtured here: your vivacity and energy, your abiding care for one another, your commitment to growth in the life of faith, your patience, and your wisdom. Your faithful and talented staff, especially Pastor Jeff, who has been a superlative colleague in ministry. Your strong and dedicated lay leaders, whose leadership is characterized by love and respect even in the midst of disagreement. In the short time I have been with you, I have grown to love you dearly. I take pride in all that we have accomplished together and cherish deep hope for how God will use this congregation in the future.

The wilderness is not an easy place to dwell, even if we believe that God has led us there. It is a place of uncertainty and doubt, of anxiety and questions, of new possibilities opening but also other possibilities lost. It is normal, in wilderness times, to feel emotions that seem at odds with one another: joy and grief, hope and fear, curiosity and dread, anger and affection. Know that there is room for whatever you feel in response to this news. Know, too, that I am still your pastor for these next few months, and I am a phone call away if you desire to talk, to vent, or simply to sit in silence or in prayer: (302) 897-4167.

The wilderness does not last forever. The God who leads us in will lead us out again. My fervent prayer for Good Shepherd is for a future of hope and renewed purpose in the midst of a world that so sorely needs the love of Christ that I have known in this place.

May the peace of Christ be with you always,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Victoria Larson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Pastor Victoria Larson



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March 11, 2021

Dear Siblings in Christ,

This letter is being written to you in the assumption that you have just read the beautifully written letter from Pastor Larson. It is important to state that we feel very sad about the departure of Pastor Larson from our church and wish her choice would be to stay as our spiritual leader.

However, we must also respect the fact that, like all of us, she must also follow her calling in the path of life. It has been a true pleasure working with Pastor Larson these last few years and I wish her nothing but the best as she follows this path into the future.

In her letter Pastor Larson speaks of the discomfort and uncertainty of dwelling in the wilderness. As I learned of this news, I must say that this describes my reaction as well. To that end we feel it is important that you, as a member of this congregation, know, that there is a plan as we go forward, and share in the on-going development of that plan.

Over the last few weeks, the Council and both pastors' Mutual Ministry Committees have begun to discuss the process of transition. In addition, Council had a very productive meeting with Pastor Sara Anderson, Associate to the Bishop, to determine the components of that way forward. Pastor Anderson has been a terrific resource, and she has assured us of her continuing dedication to support us in the future.

With that, let me fill you in on what the current plans are going forward. It is appropriate to refer to an adage that you have probably all heard in some form or fashion. That is "the only thing that we can count on to be consistent, is change." Those that are most successful accept this, plan for it, and capitalize on it.

We have an opportunity, not one that we would have chosen, but an opportunity the same, to evaluate how we organize and utilize our church's programs, staff, and committees. To begin this process, we will once again implement the Congregation Assessment Tool (CAT) Survey. Many of you are familiar with this but some may not be. In short, it is a detailed survey about our values and priorities that we will ask you to complete. Pastor Sara Anderson will compile results and help us interpret them. The last CAT summary was presented in February of 2016. Yes, five years ago! It is time to do this again. The CAT results will help us know what to seek in candidates during our next search process. To do this, we plan to establish a Transition Team that will guide the implementation of the survey in the next few months. If you are interested in serving on this team, please let us know.

We have open minds to consider even the most basic structures such as: will we continue to have co-pastors, or a lead pastor and associate pastor, or another staffing configuration? Should we rely more on lay people to support on-going activities? How will the involvement of various committees look? During this process I invite you to share your thoughts with me and the rest of the Council so we can structure the survey to include the most important topics. You can immediately begin to send emails to me with your thoughts at [rjkoopman944@gmail.com](mailto:rjkoopman944@gmail.com) or, if you prefer the postal service, you may send them to my attention at the church.

Of course, we will also be working on a short-term plan to support our needs during the interim which may include support of a part-time pastor, pastoral interns, etc. Your input here will be most welcome as well. I will send out an update within the next couple of weeks.

Very importantly, I wish to acknowledge the tremendous support that Pastor Jeff has given us in the past and has committed to going forward. I ask you to keep him in our prayers as he leads us forward and to find ways to help share any extra burden this transition will bring to bear on him. Thank you, Pastor Jeff for all you do for us, everyday!

In closing, I again refer to Pastor Larson's letter. In it she says, "I take pride in that we have accomplished together and cherish deep hope for **how God will use this congregation in the future.**" This is now in our hands and let us focus on the future with this in mind.

Yours truly,



Randy Koopman  
Church Council President  
On behalf of your Church Council