

ELDA

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DEAF ASSOCIATION
A MINISTRY OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

In This Issue

MINISTRY REPORTS

PASTOR LORI AT THE
ELCA YOUTH
GATHERING

2026 ELDA
CONFERENCE UPDATES



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY REV. LORI FULLER

Hello, ELDA community!
We are in the middle of the Advent season. Every year, the Advent season prepares you and I for Jesus' coming on Christmas Day. Advent comes from the Latin Word *adventus*, which means coming.

Have you ever wondered how Advent started? It began around the start of the 5th century, and it included four Sundays before Christmas. Then, in 1839, a German Lutheran pastor from Hamburg named Johann Hinrich Wichern took a wagon wheel and used it to make the first Advent wreath. Tradition has it that he used four red candles to represent the four Sundays and twenty little white candles to represent each day of the week in between.

Today, we have an Advent wreath. Unlike Pastor Wichern's wreath, ours only has four

candles, representing the four weeks of Advent. We light candles each Sunday until all four shine on Christmas. Instead of red, three of the four candles (the first, second, and fourth) are purple. Why? It shows a time of preparation, prayer, and reflection of Jesus' birth. The third candle is pink and shows joy!

Isaiah 9:6 shows in the Bible, "A child has been born for us. We have been given a son who will be our ruler. His names should be Wonderful Advisor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace."

For the Israelites, Advent was much longer than twenty-five days. Their waiting period lasted for thousands of years. People wondered, "Would the Savior ever come? When will this waiting finally be over?"

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY REV. LORI FULLER

We know Jesus came and changed the world at his birth. After Jesus accomplished his mission and before he ascended back to heaven, he promised what? He would return again.

Now, we are 2,000 years into this new season of Advent, and we are waiting, preparing, and feeling excited about the second coming of Christ. So, Advent is a time to look back at what God did at his first coming on Christmas morning AND to look forward to his coming again.

So today, we would like to take a moment to wish you and your family Advent blessings from all of us at the ELDA Board!

ELDA Board:

President Pastor Lori Fuller

Vice President Tracy Prince

Treasurer Mark Koterwski

Secretary Linda Fairbanks

Spiritual Advisor Janie Barlow

ELCA Liaison Pastor Beth Lockard

ELCA YOUTH GATHERING

BY REV. LORI FULLER

Pastor Lori Fuller talked with over 16,000 youths at the ELCA Youth Gathering on July 20th, 2024, in New Orleans. Below is a recap article written by John Potter from the Living Lutheran that explains more.

Lori Fuller, pastor of Palms Deaf Church in Palm Coast, Fla., shared that she first attended a deaf church as a young adult, which was life-changing. “I learned we have a God,” she said. “And God loves me and all of you...We are created for a purpose every one of us. I am not a mistake. You are not a mistake.”

Ninety-eight percent of the world’s deaf people have not been involved in a church, Fuller said, adding, “I am one of the few deaf Lutheran pastors in the world. There are more than 280,000 deaf people your age in this country..we need your help to disrupt this idea that there’s only one way to experience God’s love. If you don’t sign, that’s ok. You can partner with deaf people.”

She then taught the crowd to sign, “I am not a mistake. You are not a mistake.” Pastor Lori Fuller would like to thank the ELCA Mass Gathering team for all their hard work behind the scenes to make this conference meaningful for the youths in attendance. The next Youth gathering will occur in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 3 years. See you there!



FROM THE DIRECTOR

BY REV. BETH LOCKARD

Dear Friends:

Already, we have almost finished 2024 and in this season of **Advent**, are watching and waiting for the Coming of our Lord.

One thing ELDA has watched and waited for has been the **lay leadership training** program that will train Deaf leaders to understand the Bible better and practice how to serve the people in our Deaf ministries. We wanted Deaf people learning from Deaf teachers and creating resources to use in their ministries that all the churches and leaders could share. A team of leaders from Bread of Life Deaf Lutheran Church (MN), Christ the King Deaf Church (PA), and Palms Deaf Church (FL) has been working to develop "Deaf Spirit" for a year. After seeking funding, we finally received our first grant of \$37,450 from the Florida Bahamas Synod! We expect the first virtual classes in this two-year program to begin in September 2025. **HOPE!**

If you have thought about improving your Bible knowledge and leadership skills in your Deaf ministry or know someone who should be in the program, please let me or other leaders on our team know: Pastor Catrina Ciccone, Deacon Dorothy Sparks, Office Manager & Communications Coordinator Janie Barlow, and Pastor Lori Fuller. We will be seeking qualified teachers and gathering our first group of 10-12 students. **We want YOU!**

As we prepare for the **birth of the Christ Child** this month, let us keep **Haiti Deaf Academy** in our prayers. The students and staff of this school were forced to leave suddenly when gang members running the

country approached the school which was located in the countryside. God empowered ALL staff and students to escape safely and relocate to another part of the island. The details of this "Godwink" are private to ensure continued safety. **JOY!**

We remember when King Herod in the Bible ordered his soldiers to search for and kill Baby Jesus. **We pray for the Deaf and their families** in Gaza, Israel, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Ukraine, and other places of conflict around the world. We pray for protection, food, water, shelter, and PEACE. We pray world leaders can focus on keeping innocent people safe instead of killing.

As we move from Christmas into **Epiphany on January 6**, take time to celebrate the Light of the World, **JESUS**, who has come for you and me. Share that **LIGHT** with others! There is an article in this newsletter telling how **Pastor Lori Fuller shared her light at the National ELCA Youth Gathering** and spoke to 16,000 youth about growing up Deaf and learning how God loves each of us as part of His family. This is important for all youth to hear that God created each of us as unique people and we are each wonderfully made.

Advent hope, Christmas joy, and Epiphany light,

Pastor Beth Lockard
ELCA Deaf Ministries



MINISTRY REPORTS

SHARING HANDS ST. MATTHEW'S NORTH HOLLYWOOD, CA

The holidays in November and December have been an incredibly busy and fulfilling time for us at Sharing Hands. Here are some highlights of our activities during this joyous season:

Thanksgiving Potluck and Advent Preparation

Following our heartfelt Thanksgiving potluck, Sharing Hands members joined together to decorate St. Matthew's Lutheran Church for the Advent season. It was a wonderful way to kick off this special time of year with fellowship and creativity.

Bag Lunch Making for NoHo Home Alliance

On December 1st, we gathered as a community to assemble lunch bags for our partner organization, NoHo Home Alliance. This activity was a true reflection of God's work through our hands, as we supported those in need during the holiday season.

Successful Church Yard Sale

On December 7th, St. Matthew's held a yard sale, and several Sharing Hands members eagerly participated. Their efforts contributed to an incredible success, raising over \$600 to support the church and its programs. What an amazing accomplishment!

Christmas Worship Service with ASL Interpretation

As Christmas approaches, we are excited to announce that St. Matthew's will host a special worship service with an American Sign Language interpreter. This ensures that everyone can fully participate in celebrating the birth of Christ.

Thank you to all who have contributed their time, energy, and love to make this season so meaningful. We are grateful for the blessings we have shared and look forward to continuing our mission together.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

-Christopher Luna



MINISTRY REPORTS

PALMS DEAF CHURCH **PALM COAST, FL**

Palms Deaf Church has been busy. On November 9th, we rejoiced in celebrating Tracy and Angela Blair-Prince's marriage. Please take a moment to say congratulations



to the happy couple. Palms Deaf Church has also been busy with activities, including a fall festival, a Christmas party, yard sales for fundraising, and much more. But I want to take a moment to thank our local partners—St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Melbourne, FL, St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in Longwood, FL, and St. Philip's Lutheran Church in Mount Dora, FL—for their continued support of Palms Deaf Church. Without their support and that of many others, we would not be able to do what we are doing at Palms Deaf Church. They also show what it looks like to be one body of Christ when we work together. Thanks be to God.

WORD OF LIFE DEAF **LANCASTER, PA**

In 2019, WOLD began studying "Bible Stories to Know." Pr. Russ didn't know it at the time, but this study has turned out to be the longest study on a topic at WOLD – 5 years (note: Covid put bible study on hold for 2 yrs.)! Over 160 stories have been covered so far. Soon, though, "Bible Stories to Know" will come to an end, and a new topic will be started. If you're not involved in a bible study, join WOLD's via Zoom! Bible study is Wednesday nights at 7pm – use Meeting ID 813 2024 7582 and Passcode 790079.



WOLD will have Christmas Eve service at 5:30 p.m. WOLD will not have in-church worship the Sunday following Christmas because the pastor will be away. Bible study is also on break for Christmas & New Years'.

WOLD's after-Christmas banquet will be Jan. 4th, and WOLD plans another Lunch-and-Movie event in February.

When Epiphany starts in January, WOLD will again use its Epiphany Star in worship. Epiphany has 8 Sundays this time around, so the star will be full of candles. WOLD members like guessing the color of each week's candle.

MINISTRY REPORTS

HEARTLAND EPHPHATHA SIOUX FALLS, SD



Our ministry had a Deaf Awareness Sunday on November 10, 2024. We invited Rev Lori Fuller to join us in South Dakota. We had a great time of fellowship and learning.

We also showed the Jesus movie to our community. We had over 50 people show up to our church to watch the ASL movie. We thank Lori for her willingness to join us and to help us on this very successful ministry event.



Haiti Deaf Academy

Excerpt from the Haiti Deaf Academy Report by Darwin Covington the HDA Child Sponsorship Coordinator

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel Isaiah 7:14.

Thank you all, for generous support. Our children are blessed to have people from all walks of life stepping up and caring for them. Children they will most likely never meet. With

Christmas quickly approaching, our children would normally be heading home soon for Christmas break, to spend time with their families. *Since we had to evacuate to a safer place, most of our staff and our children will remain together, and we will do Christmas together as our own family. We have yet to get all of our children safely with us. We have a couple more joining us this week. It is such a vital time for those who have yet to learn a language. Time is very precious, we can't turn the clock back to regain lost time as you know, so we strive to have them with us, and to make the most of the time we have with them. Thank you so much for sharing your resources with our children. Thank you so much for praying with and for us.

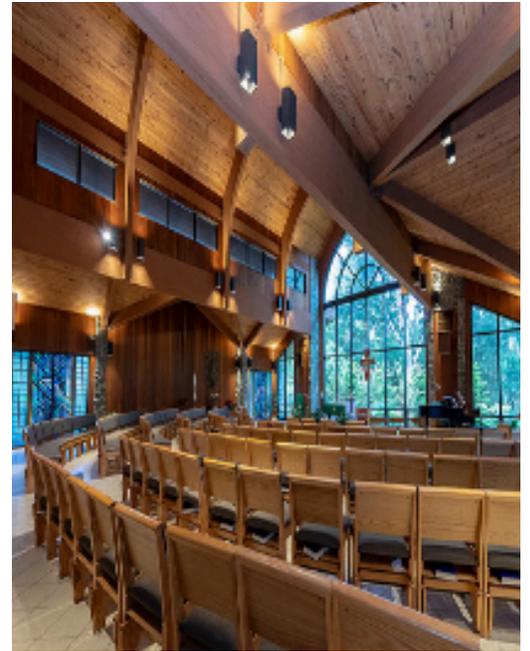
ELDA CONFERENCE 2026

Palms Deaf Church Committee has been working hard to find a location for our next ELDA Conference in 2026.

Good news! We have found a place. Where? San Pedro Spiritual Development Center in Winter Park, FL. The retreat center has the best prices, accommodations, and much more. The best is that the center is only 30 minutes from the Orlando airport!

You can also find out more information about the center here: <https://www.sanpedrocenter.org/>

Be on the lookout for more information as we finalize the details! We look forward to seeing you there.



POST ELECTION MESSAGE

Here is a powerful video that our ELCA bishop sent out after the election. It is short and is captioned. Please watch and share with others.

If link doesn't work search Post-Election message Elizabeth Eaton on YouTube

**WOVEN TOGETHER:
A POST-ELECTION
MESSAGE**

Elizabeth Eaton
ELCA Presiding Bishop

ELCA

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We'd love to put it in our next newsletter.

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