

Greetings beloved friends!

We hope this finds you well in the new year, at peace and with hope. We are sending along some updates about our life and ministry, some thoughts on the Australia fires, and a video about the impact of the YAGM program. As ever, we are thankful for you and think about you all (truly) throughout our days. Mostly though we hope that you know how very beloved by God you are.



Macy - Katie - Emma - Joe

Sanctuary - YAGM Australia Advent Retreat

In the week leading up to Christmas we gathered with our volunteers in the Sydney area for a retreat. As with previous groups, our time together included reflections on their year so far, one-on-one catch ups, discussions about race, power, mission, and assimilation, and daily Advent devotions. Our volunteers have expressed the value of time together as a cohort as well as a renewed sense of calling and purpose to their YAGM year; a re-sending of sorts.

Here is an excerpt of a poem that we read as part of our closing worship.

A Blessing Called Sanctuary by Jan Richardson

You hardly knew
how hungry you were
to be gathered in,
to receive the welcome
that invited you to enter
entirely--
nothing of you
found foreign or strange,
nothing of your life
that you were asked
to leave behind
or to carry in silence
or in shame.

. . .

The time will come
when this blessing
will ask you to leave,
not because it has tired of you
but because it desires for you
to become the sanctuary

that you have found --
to speak your word
into the world,
to tell what you have heard
with your own ears,
seen with your own eyes,
known in your own heart:
that you are beloved,
precious child of God,
beautiful to behold,
and you are welcome
and more than welcome
here.

Click the picture above to watch a video that includes an interview with one of our partners here in Australia. Pete, the director of a Luther Heights Camp, talks with Henry about the impact of the YAGM program.

Do you know anyone who is 21-29 years of age that might be interested in serving with the Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program? The ELCA is currently receiving applications for the 2020-21 cohort and we, as an international team, would love to welcome qualified candidates! Find out more about YAGM by

[clicking here.](#)



As you have likely heard Australia has experienced devastating fires recently. While there has been some relief due to rain, and some cooler temps, there are still fires and threats of fires throughout the country.

A couple of weeks ago, as fires burned over multiple states, Kim wrote this reflection -- I haven't exactly known what, or how, to post about the fires here in Australia. I keep coming back to this picture I took in Sydney in the week leading up to Christmas. The fires had already been bad in New South Wales by that point and they've just gotten worse since then. The smoke was really bad this day in Sydney, a constant reminder of the fires, but this cruise ship just kept right along welcoming passengers and pumping exhaust into the air.

I feel like this is a metaphor for our summer. Our family is fine and out of harm's way. We just keep cruising along while the fires burn all around - end

of school, Christmas, holiday celebrations, beach trips, swimming lessons etc. This isn't an indictment of cruise ships but more a picture of the paradox that happens when so much devastation exists next to so much life. The lesson seems to be that we should always be paying attention to all of it. Where do you see destruction and hurt? Where do you see life and joy? How will we (that's you and me) respond to each of these today?

The Lutheran church of Australia/New Zealand [collected some resources](#) to use for worship (individual or collective) that address natural disasters such as bush/wild fires.



Some pictures from the holidays - (L-R) our family in front of a giant tree in Sydney - the volunteers made Christmas cookies while we were on retreat together (big batches of sugar cookies and peanut butter blossoms!) - Silas and Ezra were shepherds in the Christmas Eve children's program - Boxing Day is a holiday here and we spent some time at the beach with friends



News and notes for prayer:

- After a quieter summer season things are beginning to pick up. Pray for our volunteers as they dive back into full time engagement at their work sites. Pray for us too as our ministry involvement in the Lutheran church here begins for the year.
- We are thankful for RAIN and some cooler temps that have slowed the massive bush fires. Please pray for everyone who is grieving loss of life, property, and livelihood. Pray also for the firefighters as summer continues and fire is imminent.
- Please pray for Silas and Ezra as they start a new school year next week. Ezra will be in Reception (like American kindergarten) and Silas will be in year 3.
- We will be in the US in July and August and will hopefully see you during that time. More details to follow . . .