



# **Bridges of Hope: Reflections on the Power of Partnership**

2024 LENTEN DEVOTIONS

**Holy Week**  
(March 25 - 30)



**Holy Monday, March 25**  
**LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE GREAT SPIRIT,**  
**MILWAUKEE**

**Pastor Char Guiliani:** Hi! I'm Pastor Char from Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit. And I love this theme for this Lenten season about partnership - because partnership is so important! I am Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit's [first] full-time pastor in more than a decade. And without the partnership between Outreach for Hope and the Greater Milwaukee Synod and the [ELCA] Churchwide Organization, this would not happen. And I thank all these partners for stepping up and doing what they're doing.

But I want to thank everyone who was able to attend my installation - because I want to share how important it was for you to be here, to show the congregation of the Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit that they matter to you. After my installation, a couple of members came up to me and said, "People love us. We're not here alone." And that is so important! So, I thank you for this partnership. It means a lot to me, but it also means a lot to Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit. So, blessings to you during this Lenten season!

**PRAYER:** Loving Lord: Help us to remember that we are never truly alone, and that you are with us no matter what. Help us realize that you have blessed us to be co-creators with you in this beautiful creation, and that in working with you and with one another, a wonderful harvest will flourish. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

***Using the daily devotional practice of St Ignatius in his Examen, take a moment to reflect on today's devotion...***

- 1. What thoughts, questions, and feelings come up for you?*
- 2. Invite God's Spirit to speak to you about your reflections and also what is happening in your life today.*
- 3. Notice any feelings of thankfulness, retrospect, repentance, and renewal.*
- 4. What is God encouraging you to do with these thoughts and feelings?*
- 5. Ask God to lead you today and into tomorrow - guiding you towards something particularly important.*

## Holy Tuesday, March 26 HOSPITALITY CENTER, RACINE

**Father Matthew Bauterbach:** Hi! I'm Father Matthew Bauterbach. I'm the rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in downtown Racine, and Executive Director of the Hospitality Center also housed at St. Luke's.

Here at the Hospitality Center, we are all about building bridges and connections. Some of the things that we do here are - we partner with a lot of organizations in our community and in the region. We bring in people from other organizations to do presentations, for the good of our guests who come to us. We are currently partnering with a clinic here in Racine that comes in once a week and sees guests for various medical needs. Also do other partnerships through various organizations for educational opportunities, certifications for CPR, things like that. So, a lot of connections we do are here to help people in our small community here at the Hospitality Center, in helping to improve their own lives and to build up their own skills.

But most of all, the thing that we do here at the Hospitality Center is, we build connections between people. Hospitality Center - unlike a lot of organizations, we don't necessarily do case management. But what we do is... we feed people. We bring people together. We bring people together for meals. We bring people together for social times. And for anything that - just to get people out of the elements and a place to be. Building those connections is something we are called to by Christ. Building 'Koinonia,' Christian community, where we - people can interact with one another, build social connections, help to avoid isolation, to have a place to belong. Ultimately, the Hospitality Center is not just a meal program, not just a program where we provide services... but this is a place to belong, and to bring people together.

**Hospitality Center Guest:** Because they have nowhere to eat. And this is a good place to get food, shoes, wash their clothes.

**Hospitality Center Volunteer:** I feel like I have to come here every Tuesday and every Thursday, to help to do the Lord's work... to help people who are on the fringes. And that's why I come. I feel that this is a very worthwhile place, and there's so many beautiful people here. They need some help.

**PRAYER:** Dear Lord: Thank you for guiding our lives and helping us connect with others who show us the beauty of your kingdom and the wonder of what it means to serve and love one another. In your name, we pray. Amen.

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**Holy Wednesday, March 27**  
**HOLY CROSS, MENOMONEE FALLS**  
**FURNITURE PARTNERSHIP**

**Andy Dederich (Holy Cross):** Hi, I'm Andy Diedrich. I'm at Holy Cross Lutheran Church here in Menomonee Falls.

A couple years ago, had an opportunity to begin a furniture ministry. And so, we started off working with our partners at Hephatha. And in working with Pastor Mary Martha - she's very passionate about working to get it so that the children at their church are not sleeping on the floor. And so, we've been working to collect furniture from partner churches throughout the northern part of the Synod and getting furniture to the folks at Hephatha Church. And it's really brought a lot of, I think, great opportunity for us to help people in their lives so they're getting a good night's rest. So that really gives them better preparation to be - so, those kids at school learn better and connect better into the community. So, our partnership has been very strong with Hephatha. And as we've been working with this, we've also been able to connect with a lot of people throughout the Synod, which has been great.

So, we started with Hephatha. We also then, in working with Outreach for Hope, have made connections that have helped us to support the ministry. We then were connected with Pastor David Rebey and Breaking the Chains - so, they have also had furniture needs. And so, we've been able to share furniture and supply with some of their patrons.

One of the things that we've learned about, and that's given some people some real joy... So, unfortunate situations where people pass away. And typically, some parents pass away, and they have a home with furniture in it. They've been able to gift that furniture to us, and then we've been able to provide that to other families. And that's given them a real sense of comfort, that they know that that furniture is going to people that they feel will really appreciate it and help in their lives.

So, one of the other things that we're doing with this ministry is looking for additional partners. And one of the things that we're trying to do is to arrange with some other partner churches, so that we could get help with deliveries. So, probably twice a year, on a Sunday afternoon, take about three hours for about three or four different people to help us to get some of the furniture into some of the homes. That would be a wonderful contribution.

Most recently, we started working directly with Faith/Santa Fe. So, they have a truck that we're using to be able to borrow. And it's really worked out well, so that we can be able to... I think, help to give people a better life, and a better way to pray together and work together.

**PRAYER:** Gracious Lord: May our partnerships remain grounded in love and respect. Help us to recognize the goodness in our diversity and how our unique gifts complement each other. We pray that through our

collaborations, more people will receive your healing and wholeness. Bless the work we do together, so that an abundant harvest of your love, justice and peace will be known by all. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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**Maundy Thursday, March 28**  
**VILLAGE CHURCH, MILWAUKEE - "PRESENCE"**

**Bill Koehn:** One of the missions that we have at Village Church is something called "PowerShift." We open our doors once or twice a month, from 10:30 at night until about two o'clock in the morning the next day. And we are simply there as a presence in the community.

I can recall one time in particular. A young couple came in. We have food available. We have beverages available, and we have conversation available. They helped themselves to some food. And I recall sitting down with them, just to hear their story. It was something I was not expecting... And it goes something like this: They were momentarily living under a bridge. This was a temporary situation for them. It certainly was unexpected for them. And listening to their story just made me realize why we are open on any given night, to hear stories like that and to - if nothing else, offer food, beverage, and again, conversation. Sometimes that's all people need. Before they left, they also shared with me that the young lady had recently given birth. Premature baby girl who was currently in the hospital. And I'm thinking to myself, "Oh my gosh! You know, what... what are you doing in terms of this new family that you have now developed?" What struck me is that they had a plan. And they were happy to share that plan. And that plan included lodging for their newborn as soon as they were able to take it home from the hospital. The young woman's mother was coming up, I think from Missouri, to help them out. So, even though it seemed like a dire situation for them - again, they had a plan. And if not for us being open on that particular night, being there to welcome people in, you know, to offer them whatever they needed... It was, I think, fortuitous for us.

And to me, that is what PowerShift is all about. And that's one of the missions that we continue to grow at Village Church. Are we gonna see those people again? Probably not. Is that the purpose? Not at all. The purpose is that we were there when someone needed some assistance.

**PRAYER:** Dear God: May our partnerships be like a dance, coming together, moving as one, supporting one another through the complexities and the beauty of life. Bless us to be there for one another, that we may know the beautiful expressions that partnerships can take on. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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**Good Friday, March 29**  
**GREATER MILWAUKEE SYNOD, ELCA**

**Bishop Paul Erickson:** Hi; I'm Paul Erickson, Bishop of the Greater Milwaukee Synod. One of the things that I enjoy most about serving in this role is the opportunity I regularly have to visit with and learn from our many partners. We have global companion relationships with Lutherans in Tanzania and El Salvador, and I have visited each of these beautiful countries several times. I have been incredibly blessed by these relationships, listening to, learning from, and walking with these siblings in Christ.

Of course, we don't have to travel long distances to connect with partners; we have lots of partnership opportunities right here at home. Collaboration is one of the core values of this synod, and I am grateful that so many congregations, pastors, deacons, and leaders have helped us live into the truth that we are church together for the sake of the world.

The key thing to remember, in all of these partnerships, is that at best, they are not transactional, but relational. It's not about those who have giving to those who need; it's about discovering the God-given beauty present in each and every person, each and every community, each and every congregation.

This Holy week, we are invited to accompany Jesus on the way of the cross. We need to remember that we are invited to walk the way of the cross not as individuals, but together. We need to stay connected to each other as we try to figure out how to move forward in this uncertain time. We all have wisdom and experience, and when we come together, guided, and shaped by new perspectives, we can all grow and learn together. We need to have honest conversations, setting up safe and courageous places for folks to express their fears and their hopes, their pain and their joy, to disagree and wonder and wrestle, so that we can discover, together, what God is calling us to be about. If the theology of the cross teaches us anything, it's that we don't need to be afraid of the dark and painful times in our lives, because we are not alone.

**PRAYER:** Holy God, you remind us that, in your very nature, you are defined by relationships; Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. Teach us every day how to open our hearts and our lives to receive the gifts you offer to us through those with whom you invite us to partner. Help us remember that we are never alone and lead us to the cross that brings us new life; in your holy name we pray, Amen.

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## Holy Saturday, March 30 **OUTREACH FOR HOPE**

**Pastor Chris Manke, OFH Executive Director:** Good morning and Happy Easter! Today is that day where we are preparing for something very special tomorrow, with Easter Sunday. Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!

It's been a wonderful Lenten season, as we've been reflecting on the power of partnership, and how partnership and our relationships bring us hope. This season has been a time where we've gotten to witness all the different stories of our different Ministry Partners with Outreach for Hope... Sharing powerful stories about their ministries, and how people that have gotten involved in those ministries have really, truly brought hope to people that often feel a lack of hope, a sense of hopelessness. This has been a time where we have really, truly thought about the power of partnership. And that encouragement for each of us to think about what it means to be a partner, to be in relationship with those around us, and the power of what God is doing through those relationships.

As I've thought about this theme, 'Bridges of Hope: the Power of Partnership,' it's really truly made me think of you. I preach at a different church almost every Sunday throughout our Synod, all of Southeastern Wisconsin. And it's truly been an honor and a privilege to be with you on Sunday mornings - celebrating the good news of what God is doing in our world, and celebrating how God continues to work with us - giving us the power of partnership through being together as God's people, God's family. It's that reminder of the power of 'we'... Coming together as God's family, often struggling and walking with each other through those struggles... But also celebrating the goodness of what God has done for us in this world, the goodness of how God continues to walk with us each and every day in our lives. And by walking with each other, we help each other know that power of hope, that power of God's love and grace and mercy in our daily lives.

Lent is a time when we stop and reflect upon God's goodness in our lives... God's calling for us as His children to love one another, to walk with each other through the joys and the struggles of life. But it's also that reminder that this isn't just a Lenten focus. We are called as God's children to do this each and every day. And so, it's been a privilege to walk with you during this Lenten season. Thinking about that power of partnership, power of relationships... And it's a reminder that we are to continue that through our daily lives each and every day... Thinking about how God blesses us immensely - and how God calls us to share those blessings with each other, to share through our love, our grace, our mercy, God's love and grace and mercy, in all the things we do. May we be blessed each and every day by our relationships, by the partnerships that God has formed in our lives, by that calling to be God's family... That that goodness, that love, that grace, that mercy might shine forth in all that we say and do.

God's blessings to you as you continue to do this each and every day - not just in Lent, but throughout our lives - so that all people might know God's



love through the power of partnerships and relationships. Christ is risen, He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! May you be blessed to this day and always... that you might share that love, grace, and mercy with all that you come in contact with, through your relationships, through your partnerships. Happy Easter! God's blessings.

**PRAYER:** God of Unconditional Love: You have called us to be your people, poured out your goodness on us, and called us to be stewards of all that you have entrusted to us. May we be humble in our triumphs, steadfast in our trials, and faithful in the mundane moments of life. Guide us in our efforts to walk humbly with you. In Jesus' precious name we pray, Amen.

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