This month we are celebrating the Church’s global missions. Already last month we brought 102 national flags in procession on the occasion of World Communion Day. Several worshippers guided the congregation in an opening litany spoken in English, Spanish, Norwegian, Maley, and Chinese. The idea was to celebrate unity in diversity and the beauty of God’s creation through all the world’s cultures, colors, and customs. All people created in the image and likeness of God are called into life by the love of God and in God they live, move and have their being ([Acts 17:28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+17%3A28&version=NrsV)). A life of faith calls us all to acknowledge the Breath of God in all beings, to discern the Spirit’s promptings, and to conduct a life worthy of God’s name.

The righteous shall live by faith no matter the context and especially in adversity (Habbakuk 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). Our life takes on new meaning as we deepen our knowledge of the Lord and learn to trust him. The peace, the joy, the comfort, the hope we experience we want others to know about. It’s the choice of the little child of today’s first reading who even though she had experienced the trauma of being taken as a slave into a foreign land, separated from her loved ones and her homeland, she had not forgotten the God of Israel. The brutal foreigners who had taken her were Arameans, people who lived in Aram, modern-day Syria. She became the servant girl of the beautiful wife of Naaman, who was a great military leader, honored by his king, and probably rich and famous. But there was one little problem: he had some kind of skin disease. This left him dealing with embarrassment and isolation. The girl was not vindictive and did not rejoice in the knowledge of Naaman’s infirmity and misfortune ([Prov. 24:17-18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs+24%3A17-18&version=NrsV); [Prov. 24:29](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs+24%3A29&version=NrsV); [Lk. 6:28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+6%3A28&version=NrsV); [Mt. 7:12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+7%3A12&version=NrsV); [Rom. 12:14-21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+12%3A14-21&version=NrsV)). On the contrary, she showed kindness and compassion and played a critical role in Naaman being healed of his illness and coming to know God. In her simplicity, she made a difference in Naaman’s life. She nonchalantly shared what she knew deep down to be the truth: Yahweh liberates and saves. She was not overwhelmed by her grief nor intoxicated with anger. In the midst of loss and violence, she remained focused on her faith. Those who are claimed by God can be God’s witnesses in the world—showing kindness, living in justice, expressing joy. Salvation has come to the mighty and powerful through the mouth of a little girl, just as it is acknowledged and proclaimed by what seems powerless and insignificant, the faithfulness and love of one who climbs on the cross for us.

It used to be that the Church sent ordained pastors and professionals to other countries to proclaim the gospel and to promote human development. Churches were built along with schools, hospitals, wells, and orphanages. The Word of God was shared by the missionary for conversion and therefore, salvation. Although that remains the scope of the Church, the once “unilateral” and “top-down” approach is now being reinterpreted. We do not bring God to a Godless nation but acknowledge that God is already there and we together are called to

discover the new things God is doing. We do not talk of the mission of the Church but we acknowledge that it is God’s mission to bless and save the world. God’s mission has a Church, and the Church has people celebrating God at work in the world. It is indeed “God’s work, our hands” as the ELCA’s slogan proclaims. It’s a call to be attentive and available to the presence of God already at work in the world. It’s a respectful, humble, and mutually enriching approach that calls all of us to walk side by side with the others, with no preconceived ideas of who God is and what a spiritual experience is supposed to feel and look like. We walk with people of other nations, accompanying them in their joys and their struggles, knowing that God has made all of us in God’s image and Christ has died for all indiscriminately.

Aware of the biblical truth that God intends life abundant for all, the Church continues to witness to the involvement of God in Christ through the Spirit with our broken humanity and continues to offer the healing power of the gospel. We learn to support and encourage one another to live faithfully in the light and love of God as we identify God at work in our lives and our need for repentance and transformation. If God has made a preferential option for the poor, for those who are excluded and for those who suffer, then the Church, the Bride, is faithful and loyal when she is there where Christ, her Bridegroom, is in the midst of them.

Our FL-Bahamas Synod accompanies four companion churches, all unique and special: the Lutheran Church of Haiti (ELH), the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Guyana (ELCG), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname (ELKS), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cuba (IELC). Other ELCA Synods are coupled with other Lutheran Churches throughout the world. We share the faith and we learn from each other what it means to love the Lord and serve God in the world God has loved into creation. All Churches have their specific needs and challenges, and all witness to the redemptive presence of God in the world and especially to God’s closeness and unstoppable love for the orphans, the widows and the strangers of the world: the last, the least, the lost.

Together with other Lutheran churches in the Synod, we are enabled to announce the saving power of God as we accompany our brothers and sisters in the four companion churches, and together with other Lutheran Synods of the ELCA, we accompany the global Church. We are one holy, universal and apostolic Church; we are Church together; we are blessed in the communion of the saints and witness to each other the extraordinary love of God for the world. Many of our brothers and sisters in the world suffer from prejudices, violence and all sorts of struggles. May we be a faithful and loyal Church capable of reaching out with the passion of Christ, the hope of the Spirit, and the love of the Father. May we show solidarity, generosity, and compassion even in the midst of confusion and suffering. Amen.