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“Many Ways to Be Connected”

Leadership

As churches returned to in-person worship in 2021, many expressed thanks for the online support that the ELCA Worship team at the churchwide organization provided during the pandemic lockdowns.

When pandemic restrictions halted in-person worship in March 2020, the Worship team provided resources for worship at home, technological advice for online services, guidance for reopening church buildings safely, and tips on resuming congregational song in line with federal guidelines, said John Weit, a deacon and ELCA executive for worship.

These resources, Weit said, are funded through Mission Support. “We’re very thankful for the Mission Support that we receive, and we’re happy to be able to give back to the congregations by providing online resources during the pandemic.”

Of those resources, the “Worship in the Home” webpage was especially popular, Weit said, because it included Scripture, hymn links, prayers and reflections for each Sunday.

Many congregations already had the technology and know-how to stream services live or use social media platforms such as Facebook Live, but those who didn’t relied heavily on the resources provided by Worship. Gwenn Trout, pastor of Zion (Enola) and Zion (Etters) Lutheran churches in Pennsylvania, used those resources to record services from her home via Zoom and post the videos on Facebook Live.

With the help of a tech-savvy congregant, Trout figured out how to make it all work. Now both Zions are hybrid churches, combining online and in-person services. “We’ve learned the importance of hybrid church and of reaching out ... online,” Trout said.

Sandra Rudd, pastor of Sitka (Alaska) Lutheran Church also found the online resources to be a blessing. In addition to using them for online worship each Sunday, her congregation printed out the “Worship in the Home” readings and reflections and hand-delivered them to members who lacked internet access.

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“The pandemic was a stark illustration of the fact that the church is not a building,” she said. “A lot of people say that, but we didn’t fully know it until we didn’t have a building to use. We learned that there are many ways to be connected as the church.”

