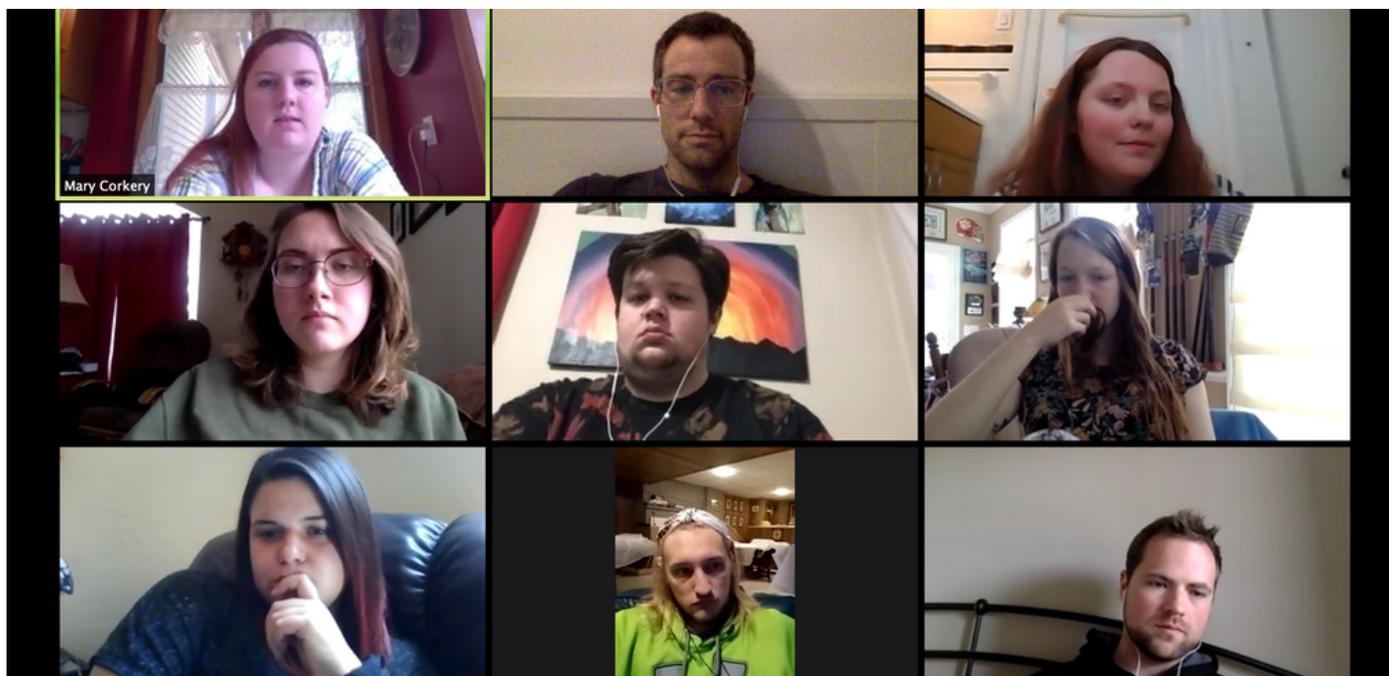


MISSIONARY UPDATE

From Zach, Rachel & Dorothy



YAGM CENTRAL EUORE GROUP MEETING ON A ZOOM GROUP CALL IN MAY

IN THIS ISSUE

CHURCH. DIFFERENTLY.

We can learn from our church partners as we plot a course for the future of ministry.

THE NEW DAY-TO-DAY

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What's the latest with the YAGM 2019-2020 cohort

OUR READING LIST

Take a peek at the books that Zach and Rachel are currently reading.

PHOTOS & THANKS

Doing Church Differently is in Central Europe's DNA

by Pastor Zachary Courter

Doing church differently is in Central Europe's DNA. It has only been just over 30 years that Christians have been able to practice their faith free from the shadow of communism and the strategy of exterminating religious belief from society. In the time of communism here in Hungary, the Lutheran Church suffered greatly. Church buildings and institutions—including schools—were shut down or taken over by the state. If you wished to practice your faith, you did so at the risk of incurring social and financial consequences for how you and your family could participate in the life of society. Enormous personal, family, and community sacrifice were required to live out one's faith.

These circumstances also gave rise to faith-full creativity. For the Lutheran church in Hungary under communism, finding a way to express their faith took a different form from what many were used to. The church channeled much of their ministry into their diaconal work.



PASTOR GYÖRGY ARADI RECORDS A SERMON FOR THE BUDAPEST-FASOR LUTHERAN CHURCH COMMUNITY.

Through the diaconal work of caring for those that the communist society did not want to care for—especially those people with cognitive and physical disabilities—the church saw a way forward when their educational institutions and worship spaces were no longer possibilities to express their faith. To this day, the Lutheran Church in Hungary continues its diaconal work. Many of our YAGM missionaries serve their communities through the work of these institutions during their year of service.

In this global season of pandemic, churches, businesses, organizations—almost everyone is being forced to rethink and reassess to how to respond to the new reality. As the Lutheran Church, we have a history of change in our DNA. Of course a pandemic and authoritarian governments are different situations, but they both share the thread of social restrictions, as well as an undercurrent of fear.

One of the many blessings of being a missionary is the mutual learning that exists between our institutional church bodies. I am encouraged by knowing the recent history of our Lutheran colleagues in Hungary and Serbia—and that their traditions share a more recent adaptation and reemergence from enormous societal changes.

If you're reading this, then chances are you've experience the flexibility and creativity of how to be church during a pandemic: online worships via social media, letter writing prayer-chains, phone calls, daily devotional videos, and the list goes on. We continue to be the Body of Christ, though the way live out those actions does look differently these days.

As restrictions loosen, it's important to know that all things—including church—won't go back to being how they were. However, we have the opportunity to keep the best parts of how we've adapted to our present situation to make the experience of God's love more approachable and accessible.

Our heritage of reformation means that sometimes the changes we make to how we live out our faith come from our own reason and understanding of God's call to us as faithful children. And sometimes, the changes spring from a necessary response from our social and environmental situations. These days, we're called to live into that heritage, trusting that God's hands will guide us along the way.

In Christ,

Zachary S Courter

Pastor Zach Courter

The new day-to-day

Physical distancing restrictions are slowly being eased up here in Hungary, as they are in most of Europe. In Budapest where we live, there are more curfews and restrictions than the rest of the country because of the population density. In the Hungarian countryside, more business, parks, and restaurants are able to be open. When shopping in stores and riding public transportation, wearing face masks is required.

Worship services in the Lutheran church are still all happening online. Most of them are through pre-recorded videos that are shared over facebook and youtube. Once a month, Zach will preach for the City Park Lutheran congregation here in Budapest.



Above: Our favorite take-out pizza place, Pizzica, reopened at the end of April. We have picked up take-out from them twice since then!

Left: Dorothy and Zach wait for their pizza order to arrive on the brisk Spring day.

Below: Out on a Mother's Day walk with the whole family (Dorothy in backpack).



Financial Support

For many of us this is a time when we need to tighten our belts considerably, but for those of us who are able to give, please consider a donation to our shared ministry [here](#). Also, consider giving to the [ELCA's COVID-19 support fund](#). These funds support local (USA) and global community virus response efforts

YAGM UPDATE

The Central Europe YAGM returned to the USA in mid-March because of the Coronavirus. Since then, the YAGM Central Europe cohort has been meeting weekly with Zach to continue to process their year and support one another in the midst of all of these changes.

All YAGM from the 2019-2020 service year will be participating in a *virtual* retreat this weekend. Please pray for them as they gather, worship, process, and share stories from their eventful and transformative year. The retreat is led by ELCA Global Mission staff, and takes place on May 15th and 16th.

YOUNG ADULTS IN GLOBAL MISSION

SAVE THE DATE

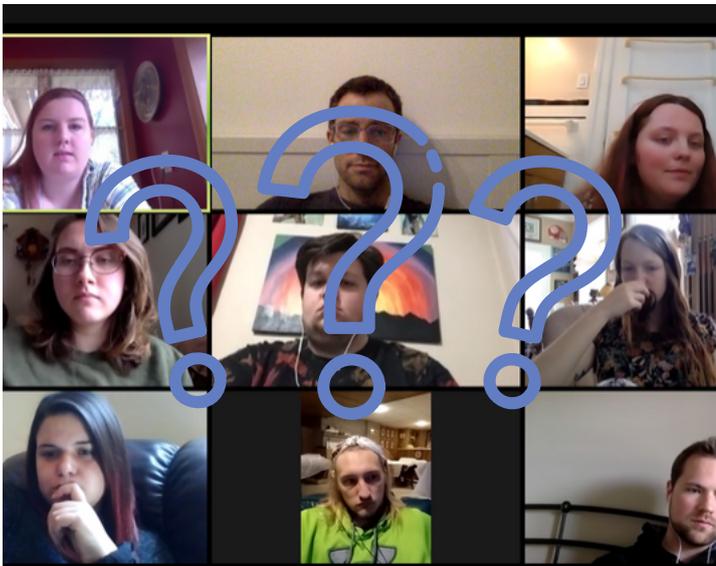
YAGM WEEKEND RETREAT

What: A virtual weekend retreat to process, worship, and gather.

Who: 2019-2020 YAGM class with supporting alumni and YAGM/ELCA staff

When: Friday evening, May 15th and Saturday, May 16th

Where: via Zoom



DO YOU KNOW ANYONE THAT IS

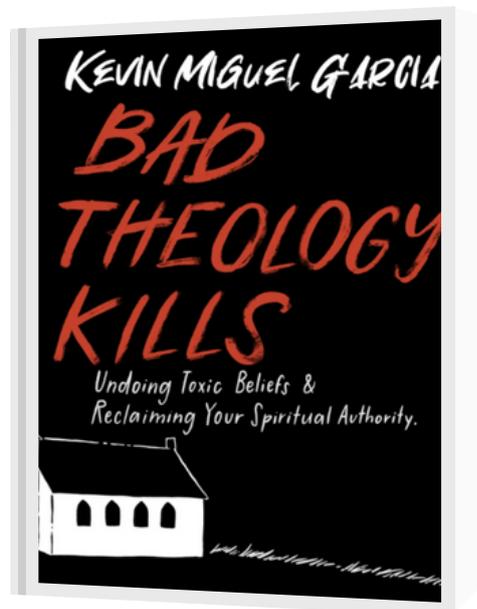
HIRING?

As you can imagine, many of the returning YAGM are in the process of looking for a job. If you, or someone you know, is looking to hire reliable, thoughtful, candidates for short-term or long-term work, please be in touch and I can pass on contact information.

What are we reading?

Bad Theology Kills: Undoing Toxic Beliefs & Reclaiming your Spiritual Authority by Miguel Garcia

This book is about understanding harmful ideas that have been dressed up in the clothes of Christianity, and used to not only devalue people's humanity, but deny that they were in fact created just as God desired them to be. Garcia explores theological ideas like sin and hell, while looking at their roots and mis(understandings) throughout the centuries, until arriving at many social "norms" of popular Christian society in the present day USA. Garcia does all of this while drawing on the pain and death it has caused in his own life and the lives of many. Though the topics are heavy, it's a rewarding read, as Garcia guides the reader to a freeing interpretation of God's love for humanity and all of creation.

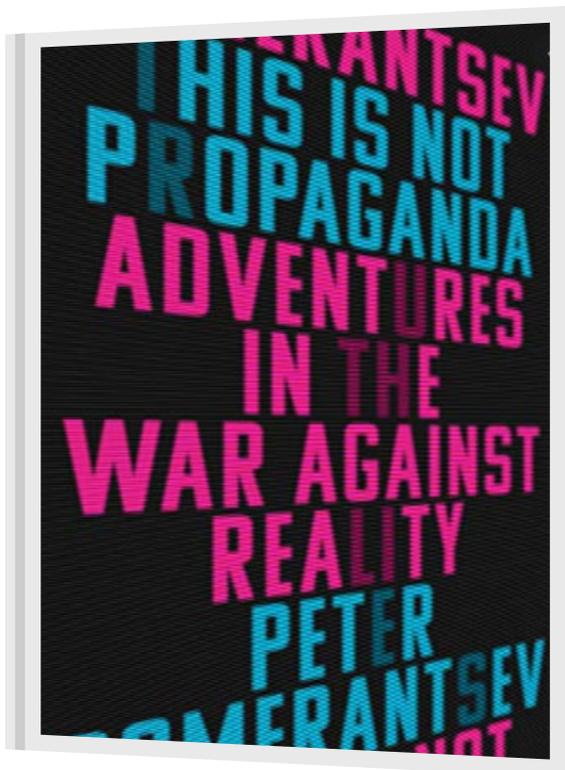


This is not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality

by Peter Pomerantsev

This book is about how digital and social media are used to control people and societies in our day and age –and how this is most often leveraged for political gain. My biggest takeaway from the book is that withholding information is no longer an effective means of control (like in the USSR during the cold war). Now, bombarding people with too much information (much of it intentionally false or fake news) is the new strategy to control people. These tactics are used to create new (false) realities that encourage people to believe lies or lose trust that *anything* can actually be “real.” Pomerantsev shows how these strategies have

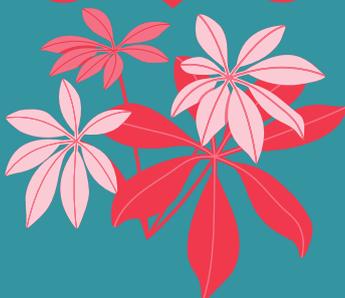
been used throughout US and international politics, geo-political information wars, and ways of stopping the free-press. As a pastor, it makes me reflect on the ways that the Gospel can be diluted and malformed to hurt people and communities, and my responsibility to work against this.



Our @Home Life in Pictures



**BiG
THANKS!**



A big thanks to our supporters and friends in ministry in the **Northeast Iowa Synod** for inviting Zach to *virtually* preach on Sunday May 3rd! Also, thanks to **Trinity Lutheran in Rhinelander, Wisconsin** for hosting a "get to know you" zoom call so that we could meet the congregation!

Be in touch with us so that we can *virtually* participate in the life of your congregation as well!

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