



Region 1 Disaster Preparedness and Response  
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
 GOD'S WORK. OUR HANDS.



## REGION 1 HAMMER & DANCE

August 12, 2020

**United for Ministry in the Days of COVID-19.**

The Social Service Agencies  
 and Synods of Region 1.

**Dave Brauer-Rieke**, Consultant

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**W**hat do you do to feed your soul and stay sane? I've resurrected a project I began 30 years ago. It's a small musical instrument, a clavichord to be. My hands and heart rejoice.

The prophet Isaiah talks about a day yet to come. He says,

***"No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime ... They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat."*** (Isaiah 65:20-22 NRSV)

The joy here is eating food you have grown and living in a house you have built. Someday I shall make music with wood and wire I glued, sanded, and tuned. To create is to be human.

Thank you to [Elise Hutchison](#) of [LCSNW in Spokane](#) for her insights into the effects of pandemics on overall societal behavioral health. "Get creative," she says. "Human creativity and ingenuity is one of the most beautiful things we have been able to witness during the pandemic."

Dave Brauer-Rieke

**Today is a gift!**



**LCS Northwest is providing all services via telehealth to protect your health during this time.**

Behavioral Health, Intensive Services & Foster Care - 509.747.8224

Crime Victim Advocacy & Education 24/7  
 509.624.7273

## A New Form of Mental Health Crisis



*My name is Elise Hutchison and I am a licensed mental health clinician in the state of Washington. Over the past five years I have worked in various roles at LCSNW, our county's sexual assault and family trauma center.*

*I am currently working as a clinical supervisor on the SAFeT Clinical Team at the Spokane, WA branch of LCSNW. Also, I am currently working on my PhD dissertation related to identifying barriers for treatment providers being willing to work with children who exhibit problematic sexualized behavior (PSB). PSB is usually as a result of early complex trauma and inappropriate exposures to sexual content at a young age. Three areas of clinical specialty are 1) treating complex trauma across the lifespan (child, adolescent and adult), 2) working with children who exhibit PSB and their families to help them build a healthy and safe family dynamic, and 3) disaster response mental health. This includes specialties in psychological first aid that is the best practice response to support the community after any type of disaster (pandemic, natural disaster or act of community violence).*

Six months ago, prior to the onset of what we now are referring to as our new “normal” better known as the COVID 19 pandemic, most mental health clinicians would have agreed that our nation was in the midst of a chronic mental health crisis. Meaning that as a nation we were seeing higher prevalence rates of acute mental health disorders present at younger ages than ever before. The reason for this is not yet clear in our research, but it is likely due to the combination of several contributing factors that have been in motion moving toward this outcome for quite some time. Due to this, even six months ago, there was a shortage of mental health providers to help support a growing population of individuals who were in need of support. An even greater shortage of providers existed of clinicians who were adequately trained to treat chronic mental health issues, complex trauma and child/adolescent mental health concerns in an effective manner. Now enter COVID-19, and you have a nation, no a world, experiencing a pandemic unlike anything seen before in our lifetimes.

Historically pandemics have the catalyst nature to effect society in one of two ways: 1) society pulls together, or 2) society falls into destruction and chaos. In the midst of the last six months most of us could say that we have seen both of these things occurring on a large scale as well as in our day to day lives. Examples of this are the person who did not know their next store neighbor before COVID who happens to be a high risk group for contracting COVID-19 is now helping that same neighbor get their basic necessities such as groceries and medication. While on the flip side we see violence, hatred, fear and uncertainty on our streets. These are examples of the best and the worst parts of our human nature.

It is typical for the human brain to respond to such uncertain times with extremes and it is these extremes which are thought to be directly linked to the spike in acute mental health concerns that we are expecting to see come October of this year. The good news is that as individuals we have the ability to choose which path we move towards through our behavior. Most of us can do small things in our daily lives to move ourselves and those around us closer to order and stability while moving away from chaos in these trying times. These are small recommendations that if integrated into daily life and upheld on a consistent basis are pivotal to human resiliency through any stressful life situation, whether it be a pandemic or loss of a loved one.

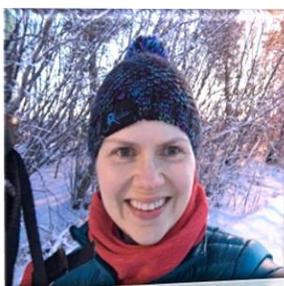
- 1) Keep a schedule and most importantly a consistent wake up time: Having a consistent routine and schedule during times of stress and chaos helps keep us having a sense of order that is necessary to balance all of the uncertainty around us. Sleep is one of the human body's most important processes so assuring a healthy and consistent sleep routine is imperative to keep yourself resilient and balanced. This will set you up for having the most successful day you can despite whatever is transpiring around you.
- 2) Stay busy and keep active: This may sound challenging during the times we are all living in and we cannot overlook the need to balance this with keeping ourselves and others safe. However, in order to stay resilient during times of uncertainty it helps to have a full schedule of things that get our bodies up and moving. Get creative and come up with a schedule of activities that keeps you up, moving and engaged.
- 3) Do more of what makes you happy: Yes there are of course things that we each need to do that are the "have to's", but these "have to's" need be in balance as well. When setting up a daily routine or schedule do your best to balance the "have to's" with the "want to's". A more balanced routine is one that will keep your tank full even in the most difficult of times.
- 4) Get creative, find a way to connect: Human creativity and ingenuity is one of the most beautiful things that we have been able to witness during the pandemic. This has especially been true when looking at how people have found ways to connect (even if it may be from a distance). Through our access to technology and human ingenuity if there is a will there is a way. Humans need social connection in almost the same way they need food or physical activity. Start trying to look at human connection as a need. Then you will be able to prioritize it and find a way to get that need met while maintaining safety.
- 5) Be hopeful: Remember we are a resilient group of people and we have everything that we need to pull together and come out of this pandemic stronger than before. People are resilient. Trust this process! Research indicates that merely thinking in more hopeful ways can improve your day to day feelings and impact your gravitation toward more positive and productive behavior.



- 6) Take opportunities to act selflessly: Take time to build this into your daily routine. We know that small acts of daily selflessness can have a huge positive ripple effect on the community, but is also shown to promote positive mental health within ourselves. There is something intrinsically rewarding doing for others.
- 7) Know when to ask for help: No one is an island and we all need support from time to time across the course of our lives. If you notice that you are unable to get back on track to feeling good on your own or with the help of your natural supports (friends and family) don't hesitate to reach out to a professional. Professional support is often most effective when you notice your need for support early and make getting in for services a priority as early as possible. I like to think of it as getting ahead of the problem.

Most importantly, have compassion for those around you as well as yourself. We are all navigating uncharted territory during this pandemic and are stronger as a society pulling together to work through challenges despite what differences we all may have. ✖

**Need a Sermon for Sunday, August 16, 2020?**  
**Dave Brauer-Rieke offers, "[Never Forget – You are AMAZING!](#)"**  
**based on Matthew 15:10-28. Exactly what is it that defiles**  
**a person anyway? Apparently not what we think.**



*"Village homes have no running water or sewer, and multiple families often share a home, making quarantine at home too challenging. Residents have stories passed down from elders of the time the 1918 flu pandemic swept the village, decimating the population. They remember and are working to keep the village safe today."*

Not every small town has an obvious quarantine site for COVID-19 patients. The people of Thornton Memorial Lutheran Church, Wales, Alaska, teamed up with local leaders to make sure their village had such a space: the vacant parsonage belonging to the Lutheran church. Through an Alaska Synod LDR COVID-19 Relief Grant Thornton Memorial will receive \$9,000 to refurbish the parsonage into safe quarantine housing.

"We are very, very grateful for the grant," said Joann Keyes, congregational council president. Keyes added that the congregation is happy they can be a resource to the whole community. Wales is a predominately Inupiat village of about 150 people that sits just below the Arctic Circle in far Western Alaska.

Thornton Memorial is the only church in town and had been used for clergy until about 10 years ago. The current pastor, Gilbert Oxeroek, is a long-time resident who already had a home. The parsonage has been used intermittently over the years as housing for visiting clergy, itinerant workers and members of traditional Native dance groups who came for annual dance festivals. Church members have also held small worship services and choir practice there to avoid heating the much-larger church building.



As church, city and tribal leaders braced for COVID-19 this spring, they arrived at a consensus that the vacant parsonage was the best place for a quarantine site. Village homes have no running water or sewer, and multiple families often share a home, making quarantine at home too challenging. Residents have stories passed down from elders of the time the 1918 flu pandemic swept the village, decimating the population. They remember and are working to keep the village safe today.

Fixing up the parsonage took a team effort. Church members put in a combination of volunteer and paid labor hours to remediate mold issues throughout the building and do a general deep clean. One church member donated a new window to replace a broken one. Norton Sound Health Corporation, a non-profit health care organization for the area, donated cleaning supplies, a table and chairs, a futon, and some bedding. The local tribal entity donated mattresses.

But the work wasn't done. The LDR COVID-19 grant will enable the congregation to remove old carpet and replace the flooring, replace doors and windows, purchase functional appliances, and do additional cleaning as needed.

No COVID cases have been reported among the residents of Wales, and local leaders hope it stays that way. But if not, they'll be ready. And after the pandemic? The congregation hopes to continue talks with local partners, such as the health organization, to see how the refurbished parsonage can continue to be a resource for the whole community.

***Thank you to Rev. Lisa Smith Fiegel, Director of Evangelical Mission for the Alaska Synod, for this article, and her wonderful work with the people of Thornton Memorial Lutheran Church in Wales.***

*Lisa's picture is at the head of this article. The photograph above is of Wales.*