



# Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

September 2021

Dear friends and companions in our global church,

God's grace and peace to you as I greet you from the campus of the United Theological College of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica. I want to share with you how my first month here has gone, from the days of quarantine to the start of the semester. Every bit of it has felt the strong impact of COVID-19.



Canon Minott, the Deputy President of UTCWI, kindly picked me up from the airport at night, after the nightly curfew had begun, and whisked me back to my house on the campus, where I spent my first eight days in quarantine. Since I did not yet have internet or phone service, I spent a lot of that time looking out on my surroundings and wondering what it would be like out there. In the photo above, you see the view from my balcony overlooking the student cottages, with the Dallas Mountains in the background and a glorious poinciana tree with orange-colored blossoms in the foreground.

Eight days is a long time to spend alone in a new place, so I was grateful to have a houseguest on the first day. I had left the side door open for the sunshine and the breeze and a curious mongoose popped into the living room until it saw me there and fled. Other people consider the mongooses pests, but I like to watch them play in the yard. They are as common here as squirrels are in the U.S.

The other wonderful gift of my back yard is the avocado tree. One day I heard a "plop" and looked out and there on the ground was a large, ripe green avocado



just waiting for me to pick it up. So I have been feasting on avocados, which are called “pears” here. The one in the photo is just getting ready to drop for me.



After eight days, I was finally released, but just in time for a three-week series of “no movement days” from Sunday to Tuesday each week. It meant that businesses and government offices were closed half the week and it was difficult to get things done. My biggest challenge at that time was getting a “tax registration number” without which no business can get done. Since the tax office was open only from Wednesday to Friday, the lines were significant, but after many hours of waiting, I did get the TRN, which enabled me to get internet and phone service. Hooray! – and just in time for classes to begin.

With COVID raging in Jamaica and only 17% of the population vaccinated by the first week of September, classes began online. Since then, my classes have moved to a blended format, with vaccinated students welcome to join me in the classroom. Some have taken me up on that offer, since it is often difficult for them to gain access to the internet. Class sizes are unusually small this year, which is worrisome for the seminary as an institution, but a boon to me as a first-year teacher here. I am teaching two courses, one on the history of the early church and one on the Reformation.

In addition to teaching courses for the general student body, I also have responsibility as the “Lutheran warden” for our one Lutheran student, Rafael van Ommeren, from Suriname. This year we are studying the fundamental Lutheran confessions in the Book of Concord together. Some of our class sessions are open to guests, so here is your invitation. If you would like to join us, please send me an email and I will send you a link to join us on Zoom for those sessions that are open to guests. My email address is [Carolyn.schneider@elca.org](mailto:Carolyn.schneider@elca.org).

Please pray for us here at UTCWI as we not only deal with the COVID pandemic but also seek to guide students in learning how to address the questions and issues that the pandemic raises for congregations and the wider church. If your congregation has found a good way to give voice to these concerns and to address them, please share that with me so that I can pass it on my students.

Sincerely,



Carolyn

P.S. In addition to prayer, here are ways to support us financially.

1. To become a covenant congregation, download the form at [ELCA.org/covenant](https://www.elca.org/covenant) form or call 800-638-3522, ext. 2820.
2. Make an individual gift by check payable to “ELCA Missionaries” with “Carolyn Schneider (GCS2016)” in the memo line and mail your check to:  
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