



Dear Beloveds,

There were many images that horrified me during the Washington DC riots. The violence, cruelty, anger, and destruction were terrible.

One image that made me both angry and almost nauseous was the photograph of the person holding up a bright yellow sign with the words, “Jesus Saves.” To be clear, it is not that I object to these words. I strongly believe that Jesus saves. But in this particular case, when one holds up a sign bearing these beautiful words but participating in mob violence, it becomes a mockery. Horrifically, there were other Christian symbols present that day. There was a giant wooden cross outside the Capitol. One man carried a Christian flag into an evacuated legislative chamber. Christian music blared all day from loudspeakers. It was disgusting to see sacred words and items suddenly used to foment violence. It was sickening, reckless, and horrifying. It was profane. The insurrection on the Capitol broke the first, second, fifth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth commandments. Any action that breaks one commandment is wrong. An action that breaks the majority of the commandments is beyond alarming. (And I could actually make an argument that this insurrection also broke the third and fourth commandments, too. This only leaves the sixth unbroken.)

In the ELCA social message on **Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy** we read,

ELCA social teaching holds that all residents of the United States have a responsibility to make government function well—not to abandon our democracy but to engage it in a spirit of robust civic duty. For Lutherans, this responsibility is lived out as a calling from God, expressed in the discipleship described in our baptismal promises. *(Read the full message here: [www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Government](http://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Government).)*

This social message states that as residents of the United States and as followers of Jesus, we all have a responsibility for government to function well. We are called to be a part of civic society. We are called to vote. We are called to be civil servants. We are called to speak out against injustice. We are called to march against hatred. We are called to peacefully protest when those in power act in ways that promote prejudice or bigotry or discrimination. We are called to speak truth. For those of us with privilege, we are especially called to examine ourselves, to listen to others, and to speak for those without voice. We are called to act in ways where God’s love is paramount – moving towards true peace, true equity, and true reconciliation. In short, we are called to live into our baptismal identity of forgiven and beloved children of God by loving and caring for God, our neighbor, and our world.

I encourage congregations and ministry sites to study the social message mentioned above. There are also other social messages and social statements found on the ELCA website to further conversation and action as we continue to learn how to be disciples of Jesus by engaging in the world. Perhaps this could be something that you and others do during Lent. But please don’t stop at reading, studying, and talking about it. Let us move forward with action. Our faith calls us to stand next to the oppressed and forgotten in faith, knowing that, as we are loved by God, we are called to love our neighbor.

I am appalled at what happened on January 6, 2021. As a citizen of the United States and, even more so, as a Christian, I am devastated. But I have hope. I have hope that out of this hatred, love will emerge. I have hope that those who have been fearful will gain courage. I have hope that we, siblings, beloveds in Christ, will join together and reclaim the words, “Jesus saves.” I have hope that we as a nation will form a more perfect union. I have hope – not because I’m an idealist but because I’m a follower of Jesus – that out of this death resurrection will come.

In God’s Spirit of Hope,  
Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee

## From our Synod Vice President



Well, Epiphany sure started with a bang. What happened at the U.S. Capitol seems momentous. Maybe ominous. Is it the end of something or the beginning? Epiphany marks the sharing of the Good News with the wise

ones from the East. These travelers had seen an omen of their own. The rising of a star that their astrologers said marked the beginning of something new. Or was it the end of something old? Or both? As 2020 came to an end, we were asked to reflect on the events of a year that marked so many endings. The ends of so many lives claimed by the pandemic. The ends of jobs. The end of security. The end of how we believed the world to be. The end to our familiar way of being church in the world. During that time, someone posted on social media the words to the carol "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." It seemed like such a fitting song, that I looked up its history. The lyrics are actually a poem written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow on Christmas Day in 1863 and reflects on another tumultuous, divisive time in American history. I have to admit that over the course of the past year or so, I've definitely resonated to the words, "hate is strong, / And mocks the song / Of peace on earth, good-will to men!" Longfellow's despair is palpable. Is this the end?

Maybe it is. Maybe it is an end to ignoring and shunting aside the systemic racism and misogyny we have overlooked for so long. Maybe our eyes, blinded by idols and lies, have been restored. Maybe it is the beginning of a better and more just society. I hope so. I have used this space over the past year to try to find the hope and the beginnings, to make space for whatever the Holy Spirit is up to in the world. Things have been messy, but then birth

is a painful, messy process. I have been proud of the way that the people of this synod have worked to assist in the work that comes with acting as midwives to this new thing God is birthing among us. As I ponder the Christmas and Epiphany stories, this much is clear. God reveals God's self to us in unexpected ways. A baby born in a stable. A king's birth announced first to lowly shepherds and recognized by foreign astrologers, not privileged insiders. Focusing on the beginnings helps to get to where Longfellow eventually arrived, as well. With the conviction that "God is not dead, nor doth He sleep; / The Wrong shall fail, / The Right prevail, / With peace on earth, good-will to men." May it be so.

### Here are a few things I or the Synod Council have been up to:

- Executive Committee met on January 7.
- Synod Council met on January 16. Our agenda included updates on Synod Assembly, plans for our Synod Racial Equity Fund, and a report on how the Grace Grants projects are going.
- The COVID-19 Relief Committee met to review one new request.
- I met with other Synod Vice Presidents on January 9 by Zoom to discuss the role of synod vice presidents. Also on the agenda was the process for member discipline.
- I participated in the installation of Pr. Debbie Boyce at Faith, Redmond on January 17.

I would be happy to visit and worship with you—online. Please don't hesitate to contact me: [veep@lutheransnw.org](mailto:veep@lutheransnw.org).

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Vice President  
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