

The Spirit

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Dear Beloveds of the Northwest Washington Synod,

I recently read the book *The Splendid and the Vile* by Erik Larson about Winston Churchill during the blitz. I was surprised to learn that

Churchill was appointed prime minister on the day that German forces stormed into Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg. He did not even have time to move into the prime minister's office. Instead, he began directing the war effort from his previous office. (And I thought that my first year had tumultuous events!)

On August 1, 2020, I will have completed my first year as your bishop. I have been excited, thrilled, sad, frustrated, energized, and challenged – perhaps you have been, too. I have been so grateful for everyone in this synod – the staff (Andy, Dianne, Susan, Traci, and David), the rostered ministers, and the members of our congregations/ministry sites. I have enjoyed working in the wider ELCA and with other faith leaders throughout the U.S. and the world. This call is truly a gift.

At the beginning of my call as Bishop, through prayer and conversation, I discerned what I believed God was calling us to emphasize as a synod during this first year:

- Leadership
- Community
- Youth and Young Adults
- Faithful Innovation

In collaboration with other individuals and groups within the synod, we began working on these emphases. And some good work is happening.

That said, I did not predict COVID-19. I did not predict churches stopping in-person worship nor

did I understand how long this pandemic time would last. I did not anticipate how this pandemic would impact each person and each congregation in this synod. I am slowly realizing that it will be a long time before we shake hands, hug, sit closely, and sing together again.

I also did not expect that in these last months we would have marches in the streets, voices being raised, and laws being changed as people said, "Enough! Enough to systemic racism and brutality against people of color. Enough!" I did not anticipate that there is new possibility in this world towards true peace and justice if we all do the hard work God is calling us to do.

This is an exciting – and challenging – time to be church. But what opportunities we have! God is calling us to new ways of living, new ways of doing, and new ways of being. Truly, God is calling us to new life in Christ! As we hear in Romans 6:4 -

"Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

So, what will come in my second year as your bishop? If it is anything like this first year, a lot will happen! I anticipate that there will be highs and lows, joys and sorrows, confession and forgiveness, surprises and wonders. Through it all, though, I trust that God will be with us - in, with, and under – as we move forward together.

Every day I give thanks for you. I am so grateful to be with you on this journey. I thank you for your trust in me as your bishop and I thank God every day for the Spirit who calls us, gathers us, and sends us out into the world. May you rest, breathe, and act in God's love, justice, and true peace.

In the Hope and Love of Christ,
Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee

From the VEEP, Kay Edgerton



There is a ton of work to be done. That is how I ended last month's article and it is still true. There continues to be a ton of work to be done to create a more safe and just society. Last month, I suggested that a first step is to turn off our self-view and turn our focus to others. Still, the tasks

seem insurmountable. How do we make any headway? How do we break through the layers of systemic racism, sexism, and all the other isms to become better, to do better? It is daunting.

I was inspired this month by the account of the un-dragoning of Eustace Clarence Scrubb in *The Voyage of the "Dawntreader"* by C.S. Lewis. If you are unfamiliar with the story, suffice it to say that Eustace was not a nice boy. He ends up turning into a dragon, realizing some unflattering truths about himself, repenting, and turning back into a boy. He is called by Aslan (our Christ-figure) and offered a baptism of sorts which results in his un-dragoning. Aslan tells him to "undress," to remove the layers of his dragon form, and he tries mightily to do so, scratching and tearing at his scales. Each time he sheds one layer, he finds another underneath. He succeeds in removing three "suits" of scales, digging deeper and shedding more of his dragon-self each time, but it is never quite enough. Finally, it is Aslan who does what Eustace cannot. The first tear Aslan makes is "so deep that [Eustace] thought it had gone right into [his] heart." Also, although the first three attempts had been hard work, they had been relatively painless. Aslan's tear "hurt worse than anything [he'd] ever felt." Once the dragon layers are removed, Eustace is returned to his human form and the pain is relieved.

So here is the insight I gained from that story:

First, if I want to be and do better, I must recognize some hard truths about myself, repent, and do the work of peeling back the layers of my social injustice dragon-ness. This can be discouraging as one layer is shed only to reveal another underneath.

Second, real change is painful and cuts deep into our hearts and that transformative act is God's, not ours. We must do our part, but, ultimately, we must open ourselves to God's redeeming grace, as painful as that may be.

Finally, full transformation takes time and is an ongoing process. Lewis notes that, "It would be nice, and fairly nearly true, to say that 'from that time forth Eustace was a different boy.' To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had relapses. There were many days when he could be very tiresome. But most of those I shall not notice. The cure had begun."

Yes, there is a ton of work to be done, but we are not without resources. If you are interested in tackling this work, the synod's Strategic Team for Authentic Diversity has several items available to congregations and individuals. Here is the link to their page on the synod website: <https://www.lutheransnw.org/Authentic-Diversity>. I invite you to join me as I work on un-dragoning myself.

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

- Awarded two COVID-19 Relief Grants to two congregations/worshipping communities who submitted requests.
- Executive Committee met on June 22 and July 9.
- I met with other Synod Vice Presidents on July 11 by Zoom to discuss reviewing rosters and synod assembly plans.

Synod Council meets August 1. Agenda items include completing the appointments of new council members, appointing new members to both the Candidacy and Personnel Committees, and approving a new Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community (SAWC).

That's it for this month. I would love to hear about what is happening in your corner of the synod and would be very happy to visit and worship with you—online. Please don't hesitate to contact me: veep@lutheransnw.org

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