

The Spirit

Volume 37, Number 11
November 2020



Dear Ones,

In this month that we celebrate Thanksgiving, I give thanks for you. May God's Spirit continue to lead and guide us in these times.

This last week my mom called to tell me that they would not be hosting a big family celebration for Thanksgiving this year because of COVID-19. I already knew that we wouldn't be able to have the raucous, crowded party that we have had in the past (and will have in the future), but it still is hard when the decision is voiced. Unfortunately, we are still in COVID-19 times. And because of this, I want to emphasize a few things for all of you.

In the last few weeks, I have been asked when the synod would have new, updated guidelines. As the guidelines were a few months old, I thought I should review and give new guidelines for where we are now. However, as I started working on updated guidelines, I realized pretty quickly that old guidelines are today's guidelines ... because we are still in COVID-19 times. Therefore, the updated recommendations sound remarkably like the old recommendations.

The NWWA Synod continues to encourage care and thoughtful preparation for your community. A care-filled response is much more than unlocking the church doors and inviting all to come. Please keep in mind the Washington State guidelines and CDC guidelines and the population of your congregation. While we are all in different phases, depending on your county, here are some guidelines that we all should keep in mind.

1. Please continue to avoid large gatherings, maintain physical distance when with others, use face coverings, and regularly wash hands and surfaces.
2. To maintain ultimate safety, the NWWA Synod continues to recommend that congregations and ministry sites continue to utilize corporate worship on an online or digital platform until February 2021 – and further into 2021 depending on the availability of vaccines or other positive markers.
3. If there is an in-person worship experience, please

consider meeting outside while masked and physical distanced and following the protocols for a corporate gathering. While this is not completely safe, this is the next safest option to meeting online.

4. If there is an in-person worship experience indoors, please understand that there is high-risk involved, and care must be taken for the safety of all. Please consider this carefully and thoroughly before implementing. Please see the synod website for further guidance.

5. If you are going to meet in-person, small gatherings are the safest option. Below are some ideas that are meant to meet spiritual, emotional, and physical needs as we continue to navigate this pandemic. (These ideas are meant to be a supplement to online worship and are only to be implemented after careful reflection and planning).

- Small group Bible studies
- One-on-one pastoral care conversations
- Bringing a meal or a card to a homebound person
- Participating in a food drive
- Having a "bring your own food" potluck gathering in a backyard.
- Sitting around a bonfire listening to a guitar
- Book Study
- I'm sure you all have many others.

If you have ideas in your congregation or ministry site on how to meet the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of people during this time, please share with others so we may safely and meaningfully meet with one another during this time. We would be happy to post these ideas on our website.

As we enter into winter, it is easy to let our guards down. We long to be together. We miss each other. And we are tired. I get it. I'm with you. I want nothing more than to be able to be with you in-person. But as we love God and neighbor, let us continue to be church in the world. Let us thoughtfully and prayerfully prepare. And let us continue to be Holy Community. And remember, dear Beloveds, we are still gathered and we are still sent – to live into the love of Jesus with all we meet.

Grace & Peace,
Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee

From the VEEP, Kay Edgerton



"I want justice," my friend Faith exclaimed, "and I'm just not seeing it." I empathize with that feeling. Sometimes, I just want a God who hurls a few lightning bolts around. None of this turn the other cheek, love thy enemy, forgive seventy times seven stuff. In her memoir, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, author and

anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston recalls preferring the stories from the Old Testament to those of the new. King David was a favorite: "David went here and he went there, and no matter where he went, he smote 'em hip and thigh ... The Jews had a God who laid about Him when they needed him." The psalms are full of calls for vengeance, sometimes quite graphic ones ("The righteous will rejoice when they see vengeance done; they will bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked" – Psalm 58:10). I have to admit that when I look around and see the suffering and the oppression that abounds these days, I feel inclined to call on God to "execute vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples" (Psalm 149:7). Let's see some justice! Let every person get their just deserts! But then, I recall the words of Hamlet: "Use every man after his desert, and who shall 'scape whipping?" (Hamlet, Act II, Sc.2), and I am glad that God is "gracious...and merciful, slow to anger, and abiding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing (Jonah 4:2).

It helps me to remember that throughout the Bible God tells us that vengeance and recompense are God's to dispense or withhold. We are called to do justice, not mete out punishment. I know this is a hard distinction to make. As an educator, I have long striven to use restorative justice practices in my classroom, but it is a constant struggle trying to move from a "consequences = punishment" to a "consequences = repair what was broken" mindset. God became incarnate in Jesus as an act of restorative justice, to give us the opportunity to repair our relationship with God. Jesus came, not to punish, but to reconcile and

save. However, it is hard to see good things happen to "bad" people, and bad things happen to "good" people. While it is tempting to lash out in revenge, I must heed the word of God: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18) It is a relief to know that it is not my job to judge and punish, but rather to "do" justice. I'm called to act in just ways, to work toward a more just world, to love even my enemies.

So, when I see what looks like God turning a blind eye to the evil and injustice in the world, I can go off and sulk, like Jonah, or I can act as justly as I can, advocate for reparations and reconciliation, and strive for a more just and peaceful world. I can remember what I'm called to do and what God keeps for God's self. "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" (Romans 12:19)

Love everyone, let God sort them out.

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

- The chair of the Synod Assembly Planning Team and I met on October 6 to review timelines.
- Executive Committee met on October 8, 2020.
- I met with other Synod Vice Presidents on October 10 by Zoom to discuss the ELCA Future Church strategic planning process and the role of synod leadership as it relates to the Churchwide expression of the church.
- I attended a virtual 50th anniversary event for REACH (Renton Ecumenical Association of Churches).

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

The Spirit, a publication of the Northwest Washington Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), is intended for synod congregations & organizations.

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