

Western Iowa Synod Assembly Report – ***Currents of Grace***
Bishop Lorna H. Halaas

Grace – “the free gift in which God gives everything – eternal life, forgiveness, purpose, meaning - and to which human beings respond by trying to earn it.” Crazy Talk, Fortress Press; 2017

By grace you have been saved!

Theologian Karl Barth writes “*To be saved does not just mean to be a little encouraged, a little comforted, a little relieved. It means to be pulled out like a log from a burning fire.*”

Grace is a gift. Grace is of God. It comes unbidden to all. Grace is free. Grace is love.

Celebrating Currents of Grace in 2020

A Synod Council retreat! Five Ordinations! Your generous giving to *Pay the Weigh for All to Eat* and to neighbors in southeast Iowa following the derecho storm! Establishing a *Fund for the Future* Endowment to assist new pastors with debt relief! Many hours of adults learning together in a new model of Discipleship Academy: *Gather, Grow and Go!* Many hours of weekly learning opportunities with rostered ministers! Congregations and rostered ministers adapting to new technology for worship, Bible study, children/youth ministry, annual meetings, and colleague groups!

Deepening ministry partnerships with Lutheran Services of Iowa; the Northeastern Iowa, Southeastern Iowa, and Nebraska Synods; Lutheran Outdoor Ministries; Grand View University; Lutheran Church of Hope in West Des Moines; and the Interfaith Alliance of Iowa.

“Every Gender, Every Race – All are covered by God’s Grace”

These words of welcome and love were adopted by the Western Iowa Synod Council in October 2020... a statement of hospitality, love, and the good news of the Gospel. God comes in grace. This is what we as Lutherans claim as central to our theology. Grace is the lens through which we see the world. It is by God’s grace that we are free to live, to care for our neighbor, and to work for justice.

Currents of Grace every day

In Holy Baptism we are “*welcomed into the Body of Christ and the mission we share.*” Baptism becomes the most important event in our lives, telling us who we are and how we are to live. We have died to our “*turned in self*” and raised to new life. We are now called to a life that will treat all of creation with mercy, love, and grace.

This means turning from “*my way*” and a culture that believes in power, greed, and status and turning to following the Jesus of the New Testament, feeding the hungry, dismantling racism, standing with the immigrant and refugee, respecting science, and honoring all people.

We grieve much these days. Our lives have been forever changed during this pandemic. We are often weary as we yearn for times past. We cannot go back. God is calling us forward into a new day. God is calling us to step away from the divisive lure of partisan politics to be the body of Christ, stepping into currents of grace, wading and splashing into the world bearing Christ’s love.

In the new year ahead

- > continued thanks to the Synod Staff and the Synod Council, and all serving the Synod in various ministries
- > welcoming new seminary graduates to the Synod; celebrating ordinations and installations
- > celebrating the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women in the Lutheran church
- > an August gathering in Fort Dodge to celebrate the people and ministries of the Synod, and to support the *Fund for the Future*
- > getting ready for the ELCA National Youth Gathering in Minneapolis, summer of 2022
- > learning about and living into the ELCA's *Future Church* initiatives
- > exploring a shared building partnership with St. Mark Lutheran Church in Storm Lake

and –

- ***BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS*** – welcoming people of all ages and embracing diversity
- ***RENEWING WORSHIP*** – firmly rooted in our tradition and relevant for today
- ***LEARNING TOGETHER*** – growing in faith; discovering new opportunities with our neighbors
- ***GROWING MISSION SUPPORT*** – telling the story of Jesus