

# The Spirit

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Dear Beloveds,

This is a picture of a calendar I have on my desk. The date on it is, "March 10, 2020. Yes, I am not making a mistake, the year on this calendar is 2020.

Last year, when I turned the page on this calendar, I had no idea that this date would mark the last time I had a "normal"

day in my office – with my staff and I talking, sitting at our desks, crowded together, laughing, doing business – not thinking at all of masks or physically distancing or washing hands (well, hopefully we were washing our hands!).

I have kept this calendar on March 10, 2020 as a snapshot of when life changed to a new reality. Like many of you, I never dreamed that one year later we would all be planning our second Easter of COVID or having second birthdays under these strange circumstances or still not knowing for sure when we might gather together safely.

I did not anticipate the suffering so many people have undergone. The hundreds of thousands of people who have died. So many who are still suffering from the ravages of COVID. The impact of this virus has been brutal for millions of people.

While I consider myself a patient person, truth be told, I am becoming impatient. I am ready to be done with this pandemic. I am ready for the pain and anxiety of this disease to be over. I am ready for the loss of life and health of so many to stop. I am ready for this underlying feeling of anxiety and fear to end.

And you? My guess is you are feeling some of the same things.

But, as we hear in many of the psalms, we don't stop at despair. As people who believe in resurrection, we don't stop at death. In this Lenten season as we move towards Easter, we proclaim that we are a people of hope, too. As I read in my devotions this morning from Psalm 147: "The Lord heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds." Through community with one another, through helping those who are marginalized, through coming together in prayer and song and worship, we are healing the brokenhearted and binding up wounds.

So, let me ask you, even as we wait, what are you looking forward to? Truly, what is bringing you hope right now? What are some things that you have learned and discovered during this pandemic that you want to take forward? We know that God works through all things – how do you see God working in your life and in the life of this nation and world?

I would love to hear from you where you see God's Holy Spirit – in your congregation, in your home, in your workplace, in the world. Where are you finding hope? Where are you finding resurrection joy? You are welcome to email me at [bishop@lutheransnw.org](mailto:bishop@lutheransnw.org). I would love to hear from you.

In this Lenten season (a season that sometimes feels like it began last March and is still happening) we trust that we are walking the way of the Lord. God's hand is guiding us. God's love is surrounding us. And God brings us hope.

May you feel God's grace through Jesus in these days. And may we soon gather in-person again.

Stay safe. Wear a mask. Wash your hands. Get a vaccine when you are eligible. And know that we are church together, even when we are physically separated.

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



## From our Synod Vice President



I don't want to go back to normal. I want to go forward reformed. I keep hearing calls to return to the way things were in what I call the "before times" and, while there are many things I am certainly looking forward to being able to do safely again (such as travelling

freely across the U.S./Canadian border to see my daughter), there are also so many lessons that we've learned over the past year that I want to build on. Not having buildings to go into, our faith communities have found new ways to take church out into their neighborhoods and wider communities. I would hate to see us pull back inside our safe shells once our buildings are able to be safely occupied once again.

In an odd way, the enforced physical isolation has allowed us to forge new relationships and strengthen old connections. The synodical vice presidents, for example, used to meet only once every year or two (in-person), but now we meet monthly via Zoom to share ideas and support one another. Being unable to travel to in-person meetings has meant more time on the territory of the synod for our bishop and other staff members. Regular Zoom gatherings for rostered ministers and lay leaders have created a greater sense of community and mutual support. Recorded sermons and worship events have brought a wide range of "guest pastors" into our homes. The relationship between the congregational and synodical expressions of the church have deepened. I hope these practices continue once the COVID restrictions are lifted.

Having our world turned upside down has revealed some serious foundational cracks. Issues that we have swept under the rug have now been brought to light. The pandemic implications of congregate

shelters, for example, have led to more serious considerations of alternatives that in the past were dismissed as too difficult. Similarly, we have had to confront the many inequities in our systems of justice, education, and religion. Issues of economic justice have also been raised as we have had to reckon with the way essential workers have been underpaid and undervalued.

Lent is a time for reflection and repentance. In the last year, we've been given much to reflect upon and to repent, individually and communally. As we move through this Lenten season, "let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord." (Lamentations 3: 40). Let us consider which aspects of the before times we should leave in the past and what lessons and new ways of being we will bring forward with us into the future. Let us commit to going forward reformed.

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

- Executive Committee met on February 11.
- Met with the Grace Grants Committee to roll out the 2021 application period and review the progress made by the 2020 recipients.
- I met with other Synod Vice Presidents on February 13 by Zoom. The bulk of this meeting revolved around the role of the vice president and best practices for remote synod assemblies.
- I participated in the installation of Pr. Heidi Calhoun at Nativity, Renton on February 14.

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).

Kay Edgerton, Vice President  
NW Washington Synod/ELCA

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