

The Spirit

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NW Washington Synod, ELCA | 5519 Phinney Ave North; Seattle, WA 98103 | 206-783-9292 | www.lutheransnw.org

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From the Bishop:

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.
Galatians 5:1

What does freedom mean to you? In this month that we in the United States celebrate Independence Day with fireworks and barbecues (yay for vaccines – we can have barbecues again!), what is freedom?

Well ... first let's consider what freedom is NOT. Freedom is NOT enormous sums of money, power, privilege, assets, stocks and bonds, cars, clothes, or degrees. Freedom is NOT being able to do anything you want without worrying how your actions might affect another. Freedom is NOT hedonism or casual cruelty. Freedom is NOT the ability to yell at someone either in person or online. Freedom is NOT to be taken lightly.

Unfortunately, we have conflated freedom with selfishness. We have decided freedom means we don't have to worry about our behavior or words. We have decided that we no longer need to be civil or caring or understanding of another's viewpoint or worldview or interest. In this synod, I am concerned at the rancor I am hearing, the level of uncivil discourse, and the inability to listen to people from different sides of different issues.

So ... what IS freedom?

Martin Luther writes in *The Freedom of a Christian* that through Christ, we are set free from sin into new life. He writes:

From faith flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a cheerful, willing, free spirit, disposed to serve our neighbor voluntarily, without taking any account of gratitude or ingratitude, praise or blame, gain or loss. Its object is not to lay [others] under obligations, nor does it distinguish between friends and enemies, or look to gratitude or ingratitude, but most freely and willingly spends itself and its goods, whether it loses them through ingratitude, or gains good will.

Freedom described in this way sounds amazing. But we know that it isn't that simple. We all know that even as baptized children of God, even as people assured that we are saved through Jesus Christ, even as people who revel in freedom – we know that we are not always cheerful and willing, disposed to serve our neighbor voluntarily. We know that the freedom we have been given through Jesus is sometimes squandered because of greed, racism, homophobia, sexism, nationalism, individualism, pride, and so much more. Quite simply, sin. We think that we are free and yet we are choosing death over abundant life.

And yet ... what a gift we have been given! For when we live fully into our baptisms, we are called into community with God and with one another. We are called into caring for one another. We are called to listen, love, and serve others – even those we might not particularly like. God calls us away from selfish behavior and into freedom to commit ourselves fully to each other. As Paul writes in Galatians 6:2: “Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” As baptized children of God and as the body of Christ in this world, we are called to the freedom of Christ. And this means we are called to a life not only for ourselves, but to die to ourselves and live truly in the freedom of bearing one another's burdens.

As a proud American, I love the Fourth of July. As a person following Jesus, I know that freedom means more than waving a flag or wearing the colors of red, white, and blue. As Martin Luther writes in his treatise *On Christian Freedom*, “A Christian is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.”

May freedom in Christ reign. May the love of Christ be with you and all that you encounter.

+Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee / bishop@lutheransnw.org



From the VEEP

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

“If a person is called ‘Heidi’ and has grown accustomed to that name, I call her by the same, and so let it be.” Johanna Spyri *Heidi*

“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches.” Proverbs 22:1

What is in a name? As Shakespeare points out, it does not change the nature of the object so named. I remain myself whether called Kay or Kathryn or Kathy. However, as the grandmother asserts in the novel *Heidi*, it is proper to call a person by the name they are accustomed to. In addition, naming, renaming, and misnaming have historically been used by one group of people to assert power over another.

The discovery of 215 bodies in a mass grave at an Indian Residential School in Canada has reminded us of the forced assimilation of so many Indigenous people not only in Canada, but also here in the United States. One way these schools sought to erase these Indigenous students’ culture was to take away their names. The poem “Name Giveaway” by Seattle born poet Phil George, an enrolled member of the Nez Perce Tribe, touches on this practice:

That teacher gave me a new name ... again. /She never even had feasts or a giveaway! / Still I do not know what "George" means; / And now she calls me "Phillip." / TWO SWANS ASCENDING FROM STILL WATERS / must be a name too hard to remember.

During Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month (May), there were calls to use and pronounce AAPI names properly. I have a cousin named Shizuko and for most of her life, she has been Susie, even in the family. It was just easier that way. My family tends to downplay cultural differences and encourage assimilation. However, this is something I am striving to change about myself. I try to listen carefully when people pronounce their names and work to pronounce them correctly.

Finally, during Pride (June), there has been a focus on using trans people’s correct names. My niece just got her name officially changed and I rejoice with her that her “legal” name now more clearly reflects her true self. During Synod Assembly, we asked voting members to identify their pronouns on their digital nametags, along with their names, as a sign of hospitality. We want to use the names and pronouns that show we see and respect the whole person.

A rose by any other name may indeed smell as sweet and it will continue to bloom and grow according to its nature regardless of what we name it. People, however, deserve the respect of being called by their correct or preferred names. We should allow every person the right to choose their own good name.

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

- Executive Committee met on June 10. We are looking for some people who are passionate about funding ministry and mission here in NWWA and have an interest in historical research. If you are interested in serving on this limited task force, please email me: veep@lutheransnw.org
- Synod Vice Presidents met June 12. We reviewed our synod assemblies, welcomed newly elected synod vice presidents, and shared plans for the return to in-person worship.

Kay Edgerton, Vice President
NW Washington Synod/ELCA
veep@lutheransnw.org