

The Spirit

The Spirit is a publication of the Northwest Washington Synod of the ELCA. It is intended for synod members, congregations & organizations. They are encouraged to reproduce these articles in their own monthly organizational publications.
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From the Bishop:

On August 1, 2021 I began my third year in the office of bishop for the Northwest Washington Synod. It is my pleasure and joy to serve God and to journey with you through this office. I am thankful for your partnership, your understanding, your forgiveness, your passion, and your faithfulness.

We are living in a time of great turmoil and great opportunity. We are living in (to use a much-overused word) unprecedented times. What does this mean for us as individuals? The Northwest Washington Synod? The ELCA? The Body of Christ?

Many of us feel **grief**. Grief at what once was but is no longer. Grief that the world keeps changing around us and we cannot figure out our place or our sense of call in the middle of so much shifting. It is difficult when the world feels rocky and unsteady. It is hard to understand that what we often took for granted is no longer. Recently I visited my hometown in eastern Washington. The town is half the size it was when I was growing up. As I walked through the downtown, businesses that have been there for decades are gone. Boarded up. Abandoned. My world felt rocked. And I grieved. What do you grieve?

Many of us feel **anger or resentment**. We divide ourselves into camps. We use the words, “us” and “them” and act as though “our” camp is always right and holy and just. We throw words around like weapons and we refuse to truly listen to the other – because we are “right” and they are “wrong.” And nothing will persuade us otherwise. In John 8 we hear Jesus tell the men who wanted to throw rocks at a woman accused of adultery, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” When the men leave, Jesus says to the woman, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.” What would it mean for us to live into these words of Jesus?

Many of us feel **exhausted**. We are tired. We are weary. For a brief moment it felt as though we were moving beyond COVID-19 and then suddenly, with the Delta variant, we were pushed back into worry and concern (I am writing this in the middle of August – perhaps the numbers will be better before you read this in September!). Quite frankly, I am tired of changing things on the calendar – wondering if something should be in-person or online, wondering if I am doing something risky or if I am not taking the variables into enough consideration. It is wearisome. What makes you exhausted?

Many of us feel there is **something more that we are missing**. We ache for connection with God and with others. We feel lonely when we are alone, and we feel even more isolated when we are in a group. We long for meaning. We yearn to truly live, move, and have our being in the Spirit (Acts 17). How does the community of Christ answer the loneliness so many are feeling? What have we missed in the life of the church and participants? How do we sink even more deeply into the waters of life that God has called us to and given us in our baptisms?

Many of us are **hopeful**. Yes, I fully am living in the reality of all that I said above. I am not a Pollyanna. And yet, I trust that God is here, God is present, God is active – in this beautiful, flawed world of ours. Right now, in our congregations and in our neighborhoods, there are grief-stricken, angry, exhausted, aching-for-connection people. And right now, God has given us the opportunity to not only reach out to these people, but to listen and reflect, grow and learn together. What a calling! What an opportunity!

I encourage you to check out the **LiVE Project** where you can connect, learn, and grow deeper in faith together and with others. <https://lutheransnw.org/ministries/the-live-project>

You might also be interested in **Living Legacy** where congregations are encouraged to have deep conversations about their values, their dreams, and what God is calling them to do and to be into the future. <https://lutheransnw.org/programs/living-legacy>

The synod staff and I are here to journey, listen, and reflect with you. Thank you for these last two years. I look forward to this new year together in Christ.

+Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee
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From the VEEP

“Does it need to be that simple?”

This was an unintentional, but telling, bit of phrasing overheard at a congregational council meeting recently. I don't know what the context was, but it speaks to our complicated relationship to simplicity. For many of us, “simple” has a negative connotation. We prefer things to be elegantly complex. We are leery of anything that seems too easy. And yet, simple doesn't have to be pejorative. Something can be straightforward and easy to understand and yet still be difficult to put into action. Jesus' command to us is simple enough: Love. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27). This is straightforward, but we all know it is not always easy. Loving those who hurt us is hard. Figuring out the best ways to act in love is complex. As the synod works on strategies for loving the unhoused, the incarcerated, and the socially marginalized, we may disagree on the best paths forward. As congregations consider the best way to love one another while navigating the constantly changing restrictions on in-person worship, there will be confusion and frustration. However, we don't need to make things unnecessarily complicated. As we tackle the hard work of being God's presence in the world, let us KISS – Keep It Simple Students (of Christ).

“But his servants caught up with him and said, “Father, if the prophet had asked you to do something hard and heroic, wouldn't you have done it? So why not this simple ‘wash and be clean’?” 2 Kings 5:13 (The Message)

As we continue to battle this pandemic, please do “wash and be clean.” Wear masks, stay physically distant, avoid large indoor gatherings, get vaccinated if you are able. In these times, these simple acts really are “hard and heroic.” When we ask ourselves WWJD, let us remember that the simple answer is always “love.” Does it *need* to be this simple? Maybe not, but maybe it *should* be.

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

- The volunteer recruitment team has been raising up names for potential committee members. I'd like to thank them for this work and ask those we contact to prayerfully consider sharing their gifts with the synod.
- I met several times with the Vice Presidents Gathering Planning Committee. We had hoped to have an in-person gathering in Chicago in October, but the spread of the Delta Variant has led us to reconsider. This is hard because, like so many others, we are longing to be in one another's presence. We are, however, thankful for the technology that makes other forms of connection possible and remember that God is with us all, even when we are scattered around the country.
- Executive Committee met on August 12. Among other actions, we approved disbursements through the Racial Equity and Reparations fund and the Gloria Dei Endowment.
- Synod Vice Presidents met by Zoom on Saturday, August 14 for our regular monthly informational session. Question of the day: How are synods dealing with pastor and/or lay leadership burnout.

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