

November 2021



From the Bishop: What is Our Purpose?

The ELCA's Statement of Purpose is found in every congregation constitution, every synod constitution and in the ELCA Constitution. In the ELCA Constitution (4.01) we read: "The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world." This same Statement of Purpose is found in the NWWA Synod Constitution S6.01 and in the Model Constitution for Congregations C4.01. I encourage you to read ELCA's entire Statement of Purpose. It is beautiful and energizing. (Find the constitutions here: <https://www.lutheransnw.org/resources/constitutions>)

When I read the Statement of Purpose, it helps me remember who and whose I am and what I am called to do and to be. You see, sometimes we forget. Sometimes we forget what it means to be children of God, redeemed by Christ, and sent into the world. Sometimes we get caught up in finances or building maintenance, we get lost in petty disagreements and who should do what and so many other things, that we forget that we are created, empowered, called, and sent by God – by *GOD* – to live into and to share what God is already doing in the world – in God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying work in and for the world.

How do we live into this Statement of Purpose?

Below I propose three ways that we can (there are many more but I only have so much space).

Relationship: There are so many people in this world who are lonely, who are discouraged, who are anxious, who are tired. There are so many who feel unloved, unwelcomed, unwanted. They are living in your neighborhood, they are shopping at your grocery store, they have kids in school with your kids or grandkids, they are walking by your church every day. They are looking for relationship and for friendship. In a 2019 survey by CIGNA, 61% of working people identified as lonely. Did you catch that? Over half of people who are working are lonely. And this survey was taken before the pandemic. I can only surmise that the number is higher after 18 months of COVID life. Other studies I have read state that loneliness and isolation lead to physical and emotional difficulties as well as societal polarization. This is obviously a problem in this country. So, how do we have deep meaningful conversations so that people feel welcome and heard? Have connection and deep friendship? How does this fit with our Statement of Purpose?

Impact: There are so many people in this world who are looking to do something meaningful, to change the world for the better. There are so many people who wonder how they can make a difference, how they can positively influence their communities locally, nationally, and globally. These people are living in your neighborhood, they are shopping at your grocery store, they have kids in school with your kids or grandkids, they are walking by your church every day. They are looking for impact in this world. How can they be our partners in the ministries we are already doing and in the ministries they are doing? How can we listen to them to hear what other ideas might come through the Holy Spirit working in them and through their innovation? What partners do we need to multiply the impact of your ministry site in your neighborhood? How does this fit with our Statement of Purpose?

Transformation: There are so many people in this world who are looking for transformation, for new life, for a new path. There are so many people who have lost hope in institutions, in the church, in their lives. These people are living in your neighborhood, they are shopping at your grocery store, they have kids in school with your kids or grandkids, they are walking by your church every day. They are looking for resurrection. How is your ministry site set up to not only welcome those searching, but honoring who they are? How do they know that their story is welcome? How is the good news shared with those who have never heard it and are desperate to hear? How does this fit with our Statement of Purpose?

I invite you to look at ELCA's Statement of Purpose – or your own congregation Statement of Purpose and discuss in your councils, Adult Forums, small groups, and elsewhere. What other questions or thoughts come out of what you read?

Together may we live drenched in God's love and sent out to share the Good News. For we are created, redeemed, called, and sent to live into and share in God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world.

+ Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee / bishop@lutheransnw.org



From the VEEP

How do you measure “engagement?” This is a question I’ve wrestled with as a teacher, since “student engagement” is one of the metrics upon which teacher proficiency is rated. What does engagement look like? How engaged is engaged? I have had students you would swear were completely inattentive suddenly pop their heads up from what appeared to be a deep slumber to actively and meaningfully contribute to class discussion.

I’ve had students sitting up, leaning forward, scribbling on paper, seemingly fully involved in the classroom activity reveal they were listening to music on their ear buds and doodling randomly. Engagement is a term that looks good. It is an action that we think should be easy to observe and quantify, but it isn’t always that simple.

One of the presentations we had at our recent Synod Vice Presidents Gathering was on the ELCA’s Future Church Initiative with its goal to “share the story of Jesus and the ELCA by engaging with 1 million new people as we grow the church together.” The vice presidents were asked to consider how we can lead our synods in activating the people of God to engage new, young, and diverse people. We wondered how this engagement would be measured. How will we know when to put a tally in the count to one million?

Well, there isn’t really a clear answer yet. We were told that Future Church is not a membership drive, so I guess we won’t be counting engagement by new names on membership rolls. Especially in these pandemic times, engagement might not even look like meeting people in person. Maybe it will look like attending an online forum or sharing a video on social media. Maybe it will be a hit on your website, or a comment left on an online worship stream. Maybe it will be attending a march or demonstration. Maybe it will be distributing food at a food bank or working to build tiny homes for the unhoused. Maybe it will look something like our LiVE initiative, where people can gather to learn and share wisdom. What I’m pretty sure it won’t look like is staying in our church buildings and hoping people will visit. Jesus said, “*Go* therefore and *make* disciples,” not “Stay and welcome disciples.”

As we work toward a more welcoming, thriving, and connected church, I ask each of you and your congregations to join our siblings throughout the ELCA and

- Pray for our goal – that our church might know the way forward
- Expect God to answer your prayer – look for opportunities to step into relationships with new, young, and/or diverse people
- Help others learn and grown in this work

“Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20, The Message.

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

- Synod Vice Presidents met via Zoom on October 8 and 9. We had an opportunity to share knowledge, get to know one another, and work on better understanding our roles and the roles of our synod councils in church leadership.
- Executive Committee met on October 14. Among other actions, we reviewed and clarified our restricted fund accounts and approved the revised synod compensation guidelines.

I would be happy to visit and worship with you.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me: veep@lutheransnw.org.

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