

June 2022



From the Bishop:

Today I walked my dogs. As I was walking, one person told me how beautiful my dogs were. (I agree!) Another person told me they were so glad to see the sun. (Me too!) Another mock-yelled after me when I didn't greet him, "Hey! Aren't you going to say hello?" (I smiled and waved.) I love my neighborhood in South Everett. I especially love that there are several languages being spoken in the homes surrounding mine: there is a multitude of ethnicities, there are different religious expressions, children's voices are heard at all hours of the day, and there are different food smells wafting out windows at dinner time.

Even as I experience belonging and love for this neighborhood, though, I am also aware of the troubles and heartaches here. A little girl was hit by a car and died here a few years ago. People have been affected by COVID. Rising prices are causing some to not be able to live here. People who are renting are being forced out when landlords decide to sell. And there are people affected by meth, domestic violence, and so much more behind the walls of the homes in my neighborhood.

I think of all of us in the "neighborhood" of the Northwest Washington Synod and how I love our neighborhood. I love the diversity we have in our synod. I love the different geographies, landscapes, languages, ethnicities, cultures, and foods in our synod. As I journey through the 110+ congregations and ministry sites of this synod, I am aware of the deep joys and crushing sorrows, and the connections and the loneliness that surround us. Much like my little neighborhood, there is diversity and there is belonging here. And much like my little neighborhood, there is loss and there is grief and there is difficulty. We cannot ignore that there are thorny and deep-seated social and relational complexities within us as a church and in society as a whole.

Holding the "both/and" of this reality – the true joy and the deep sorrow and frustration – is why the theme for this year's 2022 Synod Assembly is *abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*.

Now let me say this: While it is true that some may look at our theme, "Abound in Hope" and assume that we are naively optimistic or positive. Others may look at our theme, "Abound in Hope" and think that we do not understand the mountain that we must climb. Still others may look at our theme, "Abound in Hope" and wonder how – with the pain Church has caused many or the sins of our ancestors – that we are only living in the present and not acknowledging the past. To those, this is what I say:

We are abounding in hope. And because we are abounding in hope we are invited into complex and difficult conversations through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are able to face the realities of life today - knowing that we are not alone. We do not ignore or downplay or pretend that there are not sad and horrifying realities in our world today. We fiercely hold on to the hope that comes only through Jesus. And, knowing this, together, we are called to be, share in, and live into the good news that comes through our risen Savior Jesus. And so ... we are *abounding in hope*.

I am thankful to be living in this neighborhood of Northwest Washington Synod with you.
May we abound in hope through God's Spirit living in this world and into God's future.

+ Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee
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From the VEEP

As I write this, we are working on the final preparations for Synod Assembly. We are looking forward to having the opportunity to gather in person as God's people after two years of physical separation. We will worship together, learn together, and do the business of the synod together. This year, most of that business is around electing synod officers and council members and approving the spending plans for the next two years. Last year, we also reviewed and amended our synod constitution. This year we have two resolutions/memorials to consider. A memorial is when our synod assembly sends a communication/request to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly for action. It has been some time since we have had resolutions or memorials to debate and vote on, but a look back at previous assemblies shows that the NWVA Synod has a history of proposing and debating resolutions around many social and political issues.

There is a full list on the synod website, but here are a few highlights:

- 2008 – a resolution against violence and discrimination on the basis of gender orientation and gender identity
- 2010 – a resolution supporting a more just and equitable tax structure in Washington State
- 2013 – a resolution urging divestment from fossil fuel corporations
- 2015 – a memorial to CWA on Eco-Reformation in the context of climate change
- 2016 – a memorial to CWA repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery

As you can see, this synod has long been active in encouraging all three expressions of the church (congregations, synods, and churchwide) to act faithfully in public life and to advocate for more just and equitable laws. I wanted to lift this up because we are once again in a tumultuous time in public life when people of faith may be at odds with the state and even with one another. I have had many ELCA Lutheran friends tell me they didn't know that we have social statements and messages that provide broad frameworks to assist us in thinking about and discussing social issues in the context of faith and life. They are meant to help communities and individuals with moral formation, discernment, and thoughtful engagement with current social issues as we participate in God's work in the world.

With the Supreme Court apparently about to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, some of my friends have asked where my church stands on this issue. In answer, I point them to the ELCA Social Statement on Abortion which was adopted in 1991. Reading it today it may seem slightly dated, especially around the question of when a fetus is considered viable, but it does describe how this church, as a community supportive of life, responds to the reality of abortion. If you are curious about this issue, I encourage you to read it here: <https://elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Abortion>. I know it has helped me articulate my position on the issue.

Abortion is, of course, just one area where we might seek guidance from the church. In fact, three years ago, in response to growing concerns about the best way to engage politically as people of faith, Churchwide Assembly was tasked with creating a social message and a social statement regarding civics and faith. In 2020, the ELCA released its social message: "Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy." In May of this year, there were Zoom hearings held as part of the process in developing what will become the more comprehensive social statement around this issue. We are reminded that Lutherans care about government because it is a gift from God intended for the safety and flourishing of human life.

If you are interested in the memorials and resolutions that will be brought before Synod Assembly this year, they are posted on the synod website. We are church. We are church together. We are church for the sake of the world.

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

- Executive Committee met on May 12. Among other actions, we approved the budget plan to be presented to Synod Assembly and made final preparations for the June council meeting.
- I participated in the Civics and Faith Listening Event to learn more about the work on the new ELCA social statement about civics and faith.
- Budget and Resolution hearings were held in preparation for Synod Assembly.