

June 2023



From the Bishop:

In 1994, the ELCA adopted a social message entitled, *Community Violence*. This social message acknowledges that the causes of violence are complex and pervasive and that violence breeds violence. This social message raises these questions:

In the face of this, what are we as a church called to be and do? What resources of our faith can we bring to bear on this apparently intractable predicament? How shall we respond to both victims and perpetrators of violence? What shall we do in cooperation with others as together we seek to counter violence in our communities?

As I write this, we have had more mass shootings in the United States than days of the year (mass shootings are defined as an incident in which four or more victims are shot or killed). The sheer volume of these killings naturally brings up the questions above – how do we respond?

First, we are called to pray. We are called to pray individually and collectively. We are called to pray for the victims of violence and for the loved ones of those harmed. We are called to pray that justice might come, for reconciliation and for peace. We are called to pray in repentance that we are not paralyzed in fear or hatred or numbness. I confess that I do not like memes that make fun of people saying, “thoughts and prayers.” My siblings in Christ, we are called to pray as people of faith! But prayer is not an excuse to do nothing. Through prayer, we are called to action.

Second, we are called to prayerfully enter into hard conversation about this issue with one another – in love and grace and accountability. Have someone directly affected by gun violence come and speak – a trauma doctor, a school counselor, a parent, a social worker. While I know some people would rather come to church to take refuge *from* the world and not engage the world, we, as siblings in Christ, grow in peace and understanding when we carefully listen and learn. When we are faced with difficult decisions or situations, the Holy Spirit gathers diverse people together to challenge one another and to discern where God is calling us to be as people who follow Jesus.

Third, we are called to advocate – especially for those without voice. Provide and call attention to resources and services that prevent violence, racism, and hate. Work individually in your own life to learn more about how systems of oppression lead to violence and humbly learn and practice. Partner with other congregations, churches, interfaith communities, and organizations to have a larger voice toward peace and justice. The advocacy arm of the NWWA Synod is Faith Action Network. Go to their website (www.fanwa.org) and see how to be engaged. For other resources, I encourage you to go to <https://www.elca.org/60days> and download “A 60-Day Journey Toward Justice in a Culture of Gun Violence.”

Fourth, we are called to treat each person as a child of God. We choose life or death every day in our words and in our actions. Fundamentally, as Lutherans, we believe that the good news of Jesus Christ has redeemed each one of us. So how do we live and move and be in this world with such good news?

Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in *The Cost of Discipleship*, “Words and thoughts are not enough. Doing good involves all the things of daily life. ‘If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink’ (Romans 12:20). In the same ways that brothers and sisters stand by each other in times of need, bind up each other’s wounds, ease each other’s pain, love of the enemy should do good to the enemy. Where in the world is there greater need, where are deeper wounds and pain than those of our enemies? Where is doing good more necessary and more blessed than for our enemies?”

As your Bishop, I pray that through God’s Holy Spirit, we may work together toward peace, toward justice, toward understanding, and toward the end of violence in all forms, especially, in this day and time, the end of gun violence.

Trusting in God’s grace, we pray, we listen, we advocate, we act.

+ Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee
bishop@lutheransnw.org



From the VEEP

One of the first things that babies do is determine where they end, and the rest of the world begins. This is why we look on with such amusement as babies explore their fingers and toes and try to determine if those really belong to them. From that point on, we humans seem stuck in this sense of the binary. We are constantly comparing things and drawing distinctions and we tend to make them complete opposites – always either/or and never both/and. Self or other. Night or day. Black or white. Male or female. Tall or short. It is truly human to make these binary distinctions. Truly human, but not remotely divine. God’s creation is non-binary. It’s a spectrum full of shades of gray, and rainbows of colors.

In the beginning, God said let there be light, and there was light. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. There is night and there is day, true, but they blend one into the another. There is morning and there is evening. There is dusk and there is dawn. There is a blending of those times. There is not a distinct point where night stops, and day begins. Each moment of every day is merely a spot on a spectrum between zero light and one hundred percent light.

God said let there be light and there was light. God’s promise to Noah, God’s covenant that the earth would never again be destroyed by flood is the beautiful spectrum of the rainbow – a phenomenon that cannot exist in only sun or only rain, but in the combination of the two. The rain, acting as a prism, bends the sunlight so that human eyes can see the different colors that shimmer and fade one into another. All those colors exist in the light that God spoke into existence. God’s creation, God’s promise is gloriously non-binary, beautifully iridescent.

In Jesus, we also see the victory of unity over the binary. God is the great IAM and Jesus the great BOTH/AND. Both fully human and fully divine, fully “us” and fully “other.” In Christ our human desire to separate and divide is overcome by God’s unending love and grace. As we read in Galatians 3:28, “There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Through Jesus we are no longer left to explore our fingers and toes to determine where “we” end and “others” begin. In Christ we no longer have to divide ourselves to fit a binary position. We are given the freedom to exist in wholeness, wherever on the spectrum of Christ we may fall.

Non-binary. On the spectrum. These terms have become part of the polarizing terminology used to sow division in our communities. I prefer to reject this way of thinking and instead embrace humanity in all its variety. This Pride month, I intend to step forward in unity and embrace wholeness in, through, and with our triune God – Creator, Incarnate, and Spirit – one God, now and forever. Please consider joining me! (Be sure to watch the Synod’s Weekly Update email for Pride events around our synod – you can [sign up to receive it in your inbox here.](#))

Here's what the Synod Council and/or I have been up to in May:

- I participated in the 5-week LiVE class: “The Kin-Dom of God & Environmental Justice.”
- Synod Gatherings: I attended and participated in both gatherings. What a joyful time!
- Synod VPs did not meet in May (it being assembly season). We meet again June 24.
- Synod Council did not meet in May because we were participating in the gatherings. The Executive Committee meets on June 14.

Kay Edgerton
Vice President of the NW Washington Synod
veep@lutheransnw.org