

October 2023



From the Bishop:

“Sometimes it’s boring. Sometimes it’s thrilling. Sometimes it makes me cry.”

(Quote from “The Wonderful Ordinarity of Congregational Life” by Cheryl Fullerton, Christian Century, March 2022)

Recently I was thinking about church. (Full disclosure ... I think about church quite a bit.) But, in particular, I was thinking about the rhythm of church life. And I think the above quote from Cheryl Fullerton sums it up pretty nicely.

Sometimes it’s boring.

I admit, sometimes there is something that is uninteresting about church. Perhaps it is the repetitive nature of it. Perhaps it is the cyclical nature of things. Perhaps it is seeing the same people in the same pew week after week and year after year.

We know that Fred will sing the hymns out of tune ... every time. We know that Mary will cluck her tongue at someone’s tattoo peeking out from their sundress. We know that Mike will fall asleep during the sermon and we know that Dan will try to share the peace with every single person. We know that the children will fidget. We know that the baby might cry. We know that we have rituals and sacraments and prayers that we say each week. We know that sometimes we won’t hear the utter preposterousness and absurdity and utterly amazing news that Jesus loves each of us and all of us – that sometimes this message sails over our heads because we’re too busy looking at the bulletin.

And yet ...

Sometimes it’s thrilling.

I always get goosebumps when I hear the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” I rejoice each Easter when we all shout, “He is risen! He is risen indeed!” Candles lit in darkness bring hope and light on Christmas Eve. When I am privileged to place bread in people’s hands and I see young, old, wrinkled, black, white, brown hands reaching out for Jesus, it is truly miraculous.

We know that Fred cares for his wife with Alzheimer’s. We know that Mary still grieves her daughter. We know that Mike works the late shift and we know that Dan only leaves his group home for church. We know that the children will hear of Jesus. We know that the baby will grow up in the community of elders. We know that sometimes we will hear and understand, if even for a moment, the utter preposterousness and absurdity and utterly amazing news that Jesus loves each of us and all of us.

And so ...

Sometimes it makes me cry.

Church is not for the faint-hearted. Church is not for people who only want to be with their own kind. Church is for the young, the middle-aged and the old. The healthy and the sick. The spiritually depleted and the spiritually full. Those who are seeking, those who are exhausted, and those who are filled with fire for justice. We all come together. The Freds and Marys and Mikes and Dans. And we sing and we pray and we receive Jesus, in community, together. Church is wonderfully boring and thrilling. We catch glimpses of the divine amongst the coffee pot and petty disagreements. We see Mary hug the tattooed young girl after she is baptized. We see Mike exchange high fives with Dan. We see Fred with tears singing at the top of his lungs, “I Know that My Redeemer Lives.”

There is nothing like church.

“Sometimes it’s boring. Sometimes it’s thrilling. Sometimes it makes me cry.”

+ Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee / bishop@lutheransnw.org



From the VEEP

As fall rolls around, many congregations are launching stewardship campaigns. Usually, these campaigns focus on how we share our time, talents, and dollars to support the ministries of the church. However, stewardship has so many other implications. Fall also means another hurricane season is upon us and warming ocean temperatures have meant that each year the storms are more powerful and cause more loss of life and property. We, in the PNW, have become used to “smoke season” when our air is fouled by wildfire smoke. We have seen the terrible devastation wreaked by wildfires on Maui (stoked by gale force winds) and in British Columbia and here in our state. The family of a member of my congregation lost everything in the Medical Lake fire in Eastern Washington. High temperatures in the south and southwest continue to break records. Climate change continues to impact us in so many ways. We need to be much better stewards of creation.

Last spring, I participated in the LiVE Project’s “Kin-dom of God and Environmental Justice” class. Sister Jessica Zimmerle led us through the ELCA social statement [Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice](#) (1993). Although two decades old, this social statement still provides guidance for us today. In addition to the social statement, we were provided with other resources to inform how we can grow in our stewardship of creation, including the new social *message* on climate care: [“Earth’s Climate Crisis.”](#) This social message reminds us that we, as ELCA Lutherans, understand that we are called to care for creation and that human activity has had an impact on climate change. We believe we are called to pursue goals, set policies, and establish practices that (among others):

- Affirms the overwhelming scientific evidence that the current rise in emissions and related global warming has been caused by human activity.
- Invite and engage all stakeholders to develop climate change solutions that are appropriate to their locale and adequate to the challenges we face.
- Promote a just transition from fossil fuels to a clean-energy future.
- Prioritize allocation of resources to those already experiencing disproportionately its costly impacts.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions. (“Earth’s Climate Crisis” p.12-15)

Additionally, we are challenged to promote creation care through preaching, worship, and educational programming, adopt congregational commitments to creation care, provide pastoral care to those with “climate anxiety,” witness publicly to the climate crisis, and demonstrate our care for creation via our budgeting and investment of church funds. (“Earth’s Climate Crisis” p. 16)

As your congregations considers stewardship this fall, please consider how you can incorporate stewardship of creation into your personal and congregational practices. As a synod, we continue to use the lessons learned during the pandemic shutdown to reduce the number of in-person meetings and gatherings related to synod business. This has had the added benefit of allowing participation in committees from people for whom travel to meetings would have been prohibitive. Here are some additional resources:

- [ELCA Creation Care Webpage](#)
- [Lutherans Restoring Creation](#)
- [Earth Ministry/Washington Interfaith Power & Light](#)

Blessings to you all in this new programmatic year!

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

- Synod Council met on 9/16/23 at Lutherwood. In addition to our council meeting, members were invited to take part in portions of the Sacred Spaces retreat happening at the same time.
- Synod VP cohort: Synod vice presidents met via Zoom on 9/23/23. Our agenda included sharing resources across synods.
- Coaching: I began the Level 1 Coaching Training, which included a day-long workshop on 9/29/23.

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