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From the Bishop: November 2025

Dear Beloveds,

Across our country, people are struggling – financially, emotionally, spiritually. Division, violence, and uncertainty are paramount. We are living in a time when the weight of the world feels heavier than most of us can bear. Families are being torn apart, communities are threatened, and political leaders are trading compassion for power. Every day seems more chaotic and unmoored than the day before. For many, fear has become a daily companion. We might cry, along with the psalmist in Psalm 13, *"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?"*

[Pause here. For we must acknowledge the pain that is happening within us and around us. Pause. This might be a long, long pause.] … Now let us take a deep breath. Now let us move forward.

After we have named the deep wounds within us and across this nation; after we have confessed our grief, our weariness, and our complicity in the broken systems that bind us; after we have allowed the truth to settle in, let us remember that this is not the end of the story. As people of faith, we don't stop at despair and fear. We don't close our eyes or turn inward or try to protect ourselves from more pain. No. Instead we open our eyes, turn outward, and we rise to follow Jesus once more – into the very places and spaces where pain still lingers and where love is most needed.

How do we do this? As people saved by grace through Jesus, how do look outward and love our neighbor? Here are some ideas from a letter (https://www.lutheransnw.org/news/letter-from-elca-bishops) signed by many of the bishops that was published in October 2025. These ideas include:

- Pray for those who are vulnerable and for all who work for justice.
- Advocate in your communities, legislatures, and Congress for laws that protect migrants, advance racial justice, and safeguard LGBTQIA+ people.
- Engage in the holy work of hospitality, creating spaces of safety, affirmation, and belonging for all of God's children.
- Model respectful dialogue in a polarized world, seeking understanding rooted in love.
- Hold fast to hope, trusting that the Spirit is still at work renewing creation and reconciling the world to God.

As a guide to this holy work, I have always loved the story of Martin Luther who, when the plague was raging in Wittenberg, chose to stay in order to care for the sick and comfort the dying. We might sometimes think of Luther as curmudgeonly and argumentative. We might also think he was more concerned with being saved by grace through faith than loving his neighbor. But Luther's courage and pastoral care during the plague shows his heart and his response to God's amazing grace. For during the plague, as people were dying around him, he stayed and cared and ministered. In 1527 he wrote, "We are bound to each other in such a way that no one may forsake the other in his distress but is obliged to assist and help him as he himself would like to be helped." (*"Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague")*

Above all things, let us not grow weary. Let us continue to hear the summons of Jesus. Let us continue to answer the call to love our neighbor – especially the most vulnerable. And, may we be the ones who, in a weary world, hope as the psalmist hopes at the end of Psalm 13: *"But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because God has dealt bountifully with me."*

Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee
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From the VEEP:

"Now faith is the **assurance** of things hoped for, the **conviction** of things not seen." Hebrews 11:1

"Therefore, let the entire house of Israel know with **certainty** that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." Acts 2:36

"A foolish **consistency** is the hobgoblin of little minds." Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance*

Faith. Belief. Confidence. Conviction. Certainty. Assurance. These are all words that we tend to use almost synonymously for things we have strong, usually positive feelings about. Often we think of these terms as the opposite of doubt or questioning. When I saw that the LiVE Project was offering a class called *Practicing Faith Beyond Certainty*, I was intrigued. The overall purpose of the class is to reimagine faith as courage, curiosity, and compassion. The first session (and, full disclosure, as I write this, we are only three sessions in) was titled "When Certainty Gets in the Way." I imagine for some people, especially those raised in a more dogmatic form of Christianity, the idea that certainty can get in the way of faith might be shocking. My spouse, for example, was raised in such a church and he continues to shake his head when he hears me talking about questions we wrestle with in our Lutheran congregations. It is as if being uncertain equates with less faith. For me, though, the notion that certainty can be a stumbling block to faith really resonates.

I've always been a questioner. I was the kid in Sunday School who asked the teacher how Adam could have named the dinosaurs when they died out before people existed. One of the things that I appreciate about being Lutheran is that we are always being made new and we support education and learning. When our understanding of the world changes, we try to change with the new knowledge. Our policies and social statements evolve as we have new information upon which to base them. I am comfortable changing my mind about something when there is new information to show that I may have been wrong. As the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson suggests, to do otherwise is to harbor a foolish consistency. That is why I am a bit skeptical of certainty. Being too certain about something limits the imagination. A comedian that I follow on social media, Trae Crowder, does a bit where he claims he is envious of "dumb" (his term, not mine) people because they are so confident in their beliefs. They are super certain - no doubt about it. I would say that is the difference between incurious and curious people. Incurious folks stop looking for more complex meaning. In this way certainty, for me, stops me from learning and growing and becoming more faithful.

Session 3 of the LiVE class, "From Predictable Certainty to Open Curiosity" addressed this, as well. Being openly curious in the church can sometimes also take courage. We want to believe that our leaders, who have trained and studied and prepared for their roles, know the answers. It is easier to just believe what they tell us. When I was in teacher training forty-ish years ago, it was not uncommon to be told I should never admit I was wrong or that I didn't know something. Students, I was told, want to believe their teachers are infallible experts. I expect some pastors and deacons were told that, as well. And yet, I could never be that kind of teacher. I wanted my students to know that I was human and fallible and that I was able to learn from my mistakes. I had no problem saying, "I don't know," but I also followed that up with, "how can we find out?" Jesus didn't expect his followers to be faithful beyond any doubt. They asked questions. They made false assumptions. Peter even let his fear overcome his faith to the point of denying even knowing Jesus and yet he was the rock upon which our church was built. I know my faith journey is just that, a journey. Sometimes I am on a clearly marked path. Sometimes I am bushwhacking through brambles. Sometimes I don't even know what direction I'm going in. The thing about faith though, is that it is also the assurance of things hoped for and not yet realized. I'm going to keep on hoping and moving forward with curiosity, courage, and compassion.

Here's what I or the council have been up to in October:

- LiVE Project: Faith Beyond Certainty (I have followed asynchronously)
- Living Hope Lutheran Church Class: "What does it mean to be a Christian against Christian Nationalism?" I have attended this series offered at my home congregation.
- Synod Executive Committee: We met on October 9. Among other agenda items, we approved a lease between Luther's Table and the Synod.
- Synod Policy Review Committee: We met on October 15th. Among other agenda items, we reviewed the Policy for Negotiated Resignations.
- Equity Team: I have continued having one-with-one conversations with leaders throughout the synod.

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