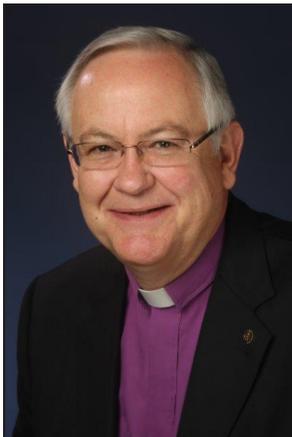


The Spirit

Advent's Invitation by the Rev. Kirby Unti, Bishop



Advent is upon us again and with it comes the scurry of activities that lead up to the celebration of the Christ child's birth. It stirs within me memories about how we celebrated Advent with our children as they were growing up. The two family traditions we participated in were the daily opening of the Advent calendar and the lighting of the Advent candles. They both

created their own challenges. We spent too many years fighting over whose turn it would be perform the rituals. Kim eventually assigned each child a day.

We had one daughter who simply could not resist opening up the little doors of the calendar ahead of their assigned day. She is the same child who knew what all of her presents were before she opened them. This came from the constant examination of them as they sat beneath the Christmas tree. She also could not keep a secret of what she purchased for her sisters and often insisted they open their presents before Christmas Day. She still struggles with waiting.

When it came to the lighting of the Advent candles and the accompanying reading we were hopeless. We just could not lend to it the seriousness that it deserved. The kids and their father too often used funny voices or tried to cut out sections of the readings so we could get on with dinner. At least one

child insisted on playing with the candle wax. And there was the battle over who got to blow out the candles. Mother was not happy with us and on more than one occasion threatened to end the whole celebration. We protested her threat, even though we made fun of the rituals, because we were not prepared to go without.

Somehow we knew that there was something holy in what we were doing. Somehow we knew the marking of each day with these rituals was a way to add value to the expectation of the mystery. The mystery that there is a God. The mystery that this God takes up residency in our world. The mystery that our God becomes human clothed in baby flesh. The mystery of God's constant coming into the world.

This is what ritual does. It calls us back to the truth. It invites us again and again to consider how something so much greater than what we can comprehend can come to be. It invites us to set aside all of the distractions of our lives to entertain for just a few moments what it means that there is a God who cares so deeply for our lives and the whole creation. A God who has the capacity to delight in God's children. Even those who lack proper reverence. Now this is a great God.

May this Advent season be a time that invites you into the mystery of the incarnation. May it provide you with a few moments of holy laughter in the midst of your preparation and anticipation of the word made flesh. Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!

Advent Open Houses Your Synod Staff would like to invite all members & friends of the synod to stop by for warm drinks and sweet & savory treats between 1pm - 5pm on the afternoons of:
Tuesday, December 2 - at the Synod Office at St. John United Lutheran Church, Seattle OR
Wednesday, December 3 - at Burlington Lutheran Church, Burlington.

ELCA Good Gifts

With the season of Advent and gift-giving upon us, ELCA Good Gifts are a creative, meaningful way to support the ministries of the ELCA that mean the most to you and your loved ones. The items in their catalog lift up examples of work being done in different projects and programs supported by funds from the ELCA: the ELCA Fund for Leaders, ELCA Global Church Sponsorship, the ELCA Malaria Campaign, ELCA New Congregations, ELCA Vision for Mission, ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response. Each of these programs is a long-term, partnership-based ministry that focuses on the needs identified by local congregations and global companion churches and their communities.

How does this work?

When you give an ELCA Good Gift you are supporting work within a specific category of ministry. For example, when you give a gift to “stock a health clinic,” your donation goes on to support the health care ministries of ELCA World Hunger where needed most. This allows our global companions to determine how these funds can make the biggest impact in their local contexts, and ensure that our work is sustainable. While exact administrative costs vary from program to program, the fundraising and administrative costs of our work are kept to a minimum. More than 90 percent of your gifts directly support programmatic work; less than 10 percent is used for administration and fundraising. Because of our long-standing, local partnerships around the world, our administrative costs are significantly lower than other organizations.

What is the difference between ELCA Good Gifts and similar organizations?

Many other organizations are doing wonderful work around the world, and some do work in similar ways. A main difference between the ELCA and other programs is that this church receives almost all of the money to fund its work directly through its congregations and members, and almost all of the money that we distribute goes to support the work being carried out by our congregations, global companion churches and ecumenical partners. This is unique because the church is our delivery system. It is successful because the church is present in far corners of the world and already connected and trusted in communities. And finally, it is sustainable. Our churches and partners are the ones who identify local needs and solutions; we just help make those dreams a reality.

What about animals? How can I talk about the importance of animals with others?

The animals of God’s Global Barnyard are among some of the most popular gifts in the catalog. Your gifts to God’s Global Barnyard support the sustainable development ministries of ELCA World Hunger, which include training, education, resources (and more) to help the community care for animals and create new market opportunities like starting a small business selling eggs, meat or dairy products.



Your gifts support this comprehensive approach to animal husbandry. In an effort to help educate others – like your Sunday school class – about the relationship between animals and hunger, check out the Animals and Hunger Toolkit. The toolkit provides lessons, activities and more to explore how animals help families and communities in need.

How can I share examples of different families who have been impacted by our gifts?

For the catalog, videos and stories of families and communities who have been impacted by ELCA World Hunger and other ministries featured in ELCA Good Gifts head to the ELCA website: elca.org/goodgifts.
(Reprinted from the ELCA Website)

The Spirit is a publication of the Northwest Washington Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), is intended for members of synod congregations and organizations. Congregations are encouraged to copy *The Spirit* and include it in their own newsletters.

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