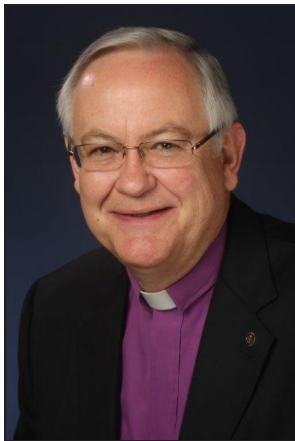


The Spirit

The Hope Light Brings! by the Rev. Kirby Unti, Bishop



One of the challenges that I face in my life is that I struggle with the experience of claustrophobia. It usually takes me by surprise when I find myself in a tight space in which I feel trapped. One of my worst episodes took place on board a Canadian ferry boat. We were down in the bowels of the ship parked between two

semi-trucks when the huge ramps of the ferry were raised into place shutting out all the natural light.

My chest constricts, my throat tightens, my heart beats rapidly, and I break into a sweat. The kind where you want to rip your clothes off. I couldn't get to the upper decks fast enough.

I also have known this experience in something as subtle as being seated at a large dinner table with people sitting on either side of me. It can also happen if I find myself in the middle of a long church pew. I have learned to request only aisle seats if I attend the theater and likewise when flying.

I have no idea why this phobia has settled into my life. I didn't know it as child and have no memory of ever being trapped. It is something I have just learned to live with. Fortunately for my worst episodes I have medication which greatly eases the panic.

What brings me reassurance when I am feeling trapped is being able to see light and to know that there is a pathway. When I am in a tunnel my heart beat slows down as soon as I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. It is a great relief to me when they finally open the door of the airplane and the outside light rushes in. Epiphany for me has taken on added meaning because I so deeply appreciate the star. The star that leads to the Savior. I appreciate in the dark of winter that we turn to the Light. The Light that no darkness can overcome.

A dear friend of mine who knows how I struggle to get through the darkness of winter frequently reminds of when the winter solstice has passed and each day adds a minute or two of day light. Facing this challenge in my life has given me insight into what it means for so many in our world who find themselves trapped by the injustices of this world. There are so many people who spend a lifetime in darkness waiting for the light to come.

Hope is when you see that first glimmer of light in the darkness. Hope is when you know there is a way forward.

It brings me great joy as your bishop to witness the many ways this church, in all of its expressions, is bringing light into the world.

May your Epiphany journey bring you hope and the reassurance that God provides us with a pathway forward.

Stay in touch and in the know!

Have you checked out the Synod Website Calendar? www.lutheransnw.org/calendar

Do you receive the Weekly Update eNews? www.lutheransnw.org/subscribe

Upcoming Events in our Synod

Service of Remembrance

Friday, January 2, 4pm at Church of Steadfast Love, Compass Housing Alliance, Seattle

Join us for a service honoring all those who have died on the streets over the course of the year or as a result of having been homeless. Questions? Contact Pastor Kristy Daniels at (206) 474-1007 or PastorKristy@compasshousingalliance.org

Read the Koran in Four Weeks

January 8, 15, 22 & 29, 7pm-9pm, First, West Seattle
Check out this unique class taught by Pastor Marshall. The cost is \$50. Limited enrollment. Call or email to register: 206-935-6530 or deogloria@foxinternet.com. For more info on the class and student recommendations, see www.flcws.org.

Byberg Preaching Conference

January 12-14 at Cannon Beach, Oregon
Look at the imagery of place and class, the ways in which context directs theological understanding, what it means to be church in a culture that has been paying less and less attention to matters of faith, and where hope is found. Registration forms at: www.bybergpreaching.org/blog

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

January 18-25
For more information and for help in planning services for your community, please visit: www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/week-of-prayer

Tools 4 Servants

Saturday, January 24, 9am-2:30pm, St. Luke's, Bellevue
Host congregations, Sammamish Hills and St. Luke's invite pastors, lay ministry leaders and passionate servants to a forum and breakout sessions to learn how to: determine pressing needs across the community, collaborate with local nonprofits, school and community initiatives, plan and execute a Community Day of Service & establish a food bank, promote involvement via media channels and partnerships with other churches and talk with the press, and empower internal ministries to broaden their reach. Cost per person is \$15, includes lunch. Registration link on synod website.

SOUPerbowl of Caring

Congregations are invited to raise awareness about hunger in the weeks leading up to the February 1 Super Bowl Game. To aid in your planning, see the 2-page document with the current facts on hunger in Washington state at www.lutheransnw.org

Church Council Training 101: Working Towards Effective Church Governance and Leadership

Saturday, January 31, 8:30am-2pm at Our Saviour's, Bellingham.

The Whatcom County Cluster of the NWWA Synod will be hosting this day-long event for congregation councils (lunch included.) As new church councils begin their work, we hope to equip our leaders with tools and ideas for renewed ministry. We have enlisted the expertise of Elizabeth Jennings, non-profit professional and consultant, to guide our learning and discussion. Learning outcomes for the workshop will include:

- Understanding basics of church council structure and accountability.
 - Understanding the differences between Governance, Support and Management roles of councils and clergy.
 - Understanding how to use church constitutions, guiding principles, subcommittees and other structures as decision-making tools.
- The discussion after the workshop will help us integrate our learning into next steps:
- Highlighting difficulties common to church councils and strategies to avoid them
 - Opportunity to talk and share with council members from other congregations.

This training is geared toward church councils; however, many of the items discussed will be relevant to other non-profit boards. Individuals who serve on non-profit boards are also welcome. Cost: \$50 per congregation or \$20 per individual. To RSVP, please email Pr. Becky Langholz at beckylangholz@gmail.com with the name of your congregation and number of people attending by Thursday, January 15.

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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