

April 2024

From the Bishop:



In fifth grade, I started playing trumpet. This wasn't the instrument that I chose – it was chosen for me because my aunt had an old trumpet and my mom said, "If you want to be in band, you can use this trumpet." But even though I wanted to play the flute, the trumpet was definitely the instrument for me. I loved playing trumpet. I loved the sound, the way to make different notes with just three valves, using different mutes that produced complexity of tone. I loved to polish and clean my trumpet – especially when I received a new silver trumpet in high school. The only thing I didn't like was carrying it to and from school because of the big hill that we lived on.

In high school I was in both band and jazz band. In jazz band we traveled to many competitions – winning the Reno Jazz Festival one year. When I look back on my experience in band, I realize that there are so many things that I continue to apply in my life, and as part of the body of Christ, that go back to being in band.

First, you can't be a band on your own. If you play a solo instrument, that is lovely. But that isn't a band. There needs to be a group to form a band – it can be small or large – but an agreement that you are engaging with one another and playing music with one another leads to forming a band. If you are using music, the same music is important – also the same key and the same beats per measure helps. An agreement on how fast or slow the tempo is important. In short, community is needed for a band.

Second, you can't all play the same instrument. I mean, I love the trumpet – but a band of trumpets is one-dimensional (and can be very loud). I admit that as much as I love brass, you need more than brass to form a band. We have all heard brass quartets – but for a band, you need the saxophone, the piccolo, the clarinet, the drum, and so much more. Diversity is needed in a band.

Third, you can't drown out others. I speak as one who plays trumpet. Trumpets know how to be loud. And if trumpeters are not careful, they will hide the beauty of the other instruments. There is nothing more gorgeous than notes from an oboe coming from seemingly nowhere to fill the air with that wistful, haunting sound. In other words, listen for the woodwinds. A variety of sounds and voices are needed in a band – especially those that are more hidden.

Fourth, harmony doesn't mean the same note. It would be boring if every single instrument played the very same note for every song in a band's repertoire. Our ears are tuned to hear melody, harmony, dissonance, and resolution. In a band, it is imperative that different notes are played – different rhythm patterns are introduced, and a play amongst the instruments happens. Harmony and dissonance are needed in a band.

Dear people of God, these four things are also needed in the church and in the world: Community, diversity, variety of sound and voice, harmony and dissonance. I invite you to think about your worshiping community. How are we all like a band? How can we be more intentional in these four areas?

Our composer and maestro is God – God is directing and leading us – in the music we co-create. May this spring awaken you in the beauty and grace of God. May the community in which you gather bring music in all its fullness.

+ Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee
bishop@lutheransnw.org



From the VEEP

“I lift up my eyes to the hills.” Psalm 121: 1

Cell phones are changing the shape of our eyeballs. I heard that in a movie recently, but I verified that scientists agree that this is so. Apparently, research done by ophthalmologists in 2021 shows that our increased screen time is elongating our eyeballs, making us increasingly nearsighted. When many of us increased our screen time during the pandemic shutdown, there was concern that this would cause new levels of eye dysfunction and it appears those fears were justified.

I was myopic/nearsighted well before the technology existed for what we now refer to as “screen time.” Even back in the 1970s when I was first diagnosed with myopia, there were researchers looking into whether people like me who did a lot of “close work” like reading and writing were making ourselves myopic or whether myopic people preferred close work, because we see best at shorter distances. Now, with increasing cases of myopia seeming to correlate with screen time, it appears that the former hypothesis may be the correct one.

Luckily, research also shows there are things we can do about this shortsightedness. First, spend more time outdoors. Studies have shown that increased sunlight decreases myopia progression. Perhaps even more important, though, is taking breaks to help the eyes rest. One suggestion is the 20-20-20 model which encourages people to take a break every 20 minutes to look at a distance at least 20 feet away for 20 seconds. My own optometrist suggested this to me, though with less specificity. Every now and then, I was told, stop and shift your gaze to a more distant view.

Not only does taking our eyes off our screens, going outside, and gazing at the horizon help our eye shape, it also allows us to reorient ourselves and see the world anew. We begin to see the forest, as well as the trees. Lifting our eyes to the hills connects us once again to God and the wonders of creation. Recently, I had the pleasure of worshipping in two different sanctuaries where the windows behind the altar open out on a natural vista. How lovely it was to lift my eyes during worship to see trees swaying gently in the background.

This year, our Synod Assembly theme is “We Lift our Eyes.” We lift our eyes to see God, our neighbor, and where God is calling us. We lift our eyes to become more farsighted, to watch what God is doing in the world. We lift our eyes metaphorically, to envision God’s purpose for us.

There is a ton of information about the assembly on the synod website. We are still looking for volunteers to help with the event itself, and also nominees for various council, committee, and Churchwide Assembly positions. We hope you will join us as we lift our eyes! (www.lutheransnw.org/synod-assembly)

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

- ELCA Synod VP Gathering: I attended this event in Chicago from March 7-9. Among other activities, we engaged in a hearing for the draft work on the new Civic Life and Faith social statement.
- Synod Council met on March 16, 2024. Among other actions, we welcomed ELCA VP, Imran Siddiqui via Zoom and celebrated Hope Church, Lake Stevens, as a new Synod Authorized Worship Community.
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Assessment: Our DEIB Assessment team held our first training on March 23, 2024.

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