

October 2024



From the Bishop:

It sometimes comes as a surprise to people, but the Northwest Washington Synod is a companion synod with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in European Russia (ELCER). For several years many of our congregations – at one time almost twenty – were connected to Lutheran congregations in Russia to share ideas, fund certain projects, learn about one another, and, most importantly, build relationships with our Lutheran siblings in Russia. Unfortunately, many of these relationships have faltered or broken down in the last few years. However, recently I was fortunate to meet up with some of our Russian Lutheran siblings and I am excited about new possibilities and new relationships.

Before I tell you about my recent trip, let me first give you some history about the Lutheran Church in Russia. Since the Protestant Reformation, there has been a Lutheran Church in Russia. While we often think that Russia only has Orthodox churches, it is interesting to note that Lutherans have persevered and endured for over 500 years in Russia – through different czars, wars, persecution as a minority church, the Soviet Union, and more - dedicated to sharing the good news of Jesus with all.

Today there are three Russian Lutheran Synods who have ELCA companion synods: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia (ELCIR) – companion synod Northeastern Minnesota, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the Urals, Siberia, and the Far East (ELCUSFE)– companion synod Central States, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in European Russia (ELCER) – companion synod Northwest Washington.

Our companion synod, ELCER, is located primarily in St. Petersburg and Moscow along with other areas around these cities. In the recent history of ELCER, Bishop and Archbishop Dietrich Brauer had to move with his family from Russia to Germany for safety after speaking against the war when Russia invaded Ukraine. Following this, the ELCER then elected a new bishop. He sadly died a few months after taking office. The ELCER then elected another new bishop and archbishop in 2023. The new bishop is Bishop Sergei Holzwert and the Archbishop is Vladimir Provorov.

Because we in the ELCA are dedicated to renewing our relationship with our Russian Lutheran siblings, and because we are unable to travel to each other's country right now due to the war in Ukraine, it was arranged that representatives from ELCA Churchwide, the three Russian synods, and the three ELCA synods would meet in a neutral country. We were blessed to have twenty of us together from the ELCA and the Russian synods gather in September 2024 to build relationships, share ideas, and worship together in Novi Sad, Serbia. It was such a blessing to be in Novi Sad with Pastor Hector Garfias-Toledo and Ms. Mary Muller representing the NWWA Synod and to be with Bishop Sergei Holzwert, Archbishop Vladimir Provorov, and Pastor Ivan Shirokov representing the ELCER.



We learned from our brothers that it has been difficult these last few years. The isolation they feel from the rest of the world is hard. They also have political division in their congregations as well as a shortage of pastors. It has also been a meaningful and joyful time. They were excited to share that many people have joined the church during these difficult years. As we shared our hopes and dreams we together talked about how to have more youth involved, how to do more lay ministry, and what are some educational opportunities. It was a full and rich conversation as we each shared and listened to one another.

After learning and discussing, and after beginning to rebuild relationships, we ended our time committing ourselves to these next steps:

- Establishing/renewing our covenant with one another
- Establishing a communication committee that will meet regularly with one another
- Have both parties feel that they are part of the universal church'
- Share experiences in social programs
- Have a gathering of youth from both synods – perhaps meet in Georgia (the country)
- Collaborate on lay ministry and what lay ministry looks like in both sites
- Have a Zoom in the next two months to continue to build relationships
- Have youth involvement in all of these things

I am excited about the possibilities before us as we live into being the body of Christ together. If you would like to hear more about this trip and ways to be involved, you are invited to come to the next meeting with the NWWA Russian Team on Saturday, October 12 at 1 PM at Trinity Lutheran, Lynnwood. We hope you can come.

As we read on the ELCA website regarding being a companion synod:

We are a church that believes God is calling us into the world — together. Companion church relationships enrich and deepen our ministries by exposing us to global challenges and perspectives as we seek to work with one another to build up the body of Christ and the world.

May it be so through the Holy Spirit.

+Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee / bishop@lutheransnw.org



From the VEEP:

“For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

“Retirement means every day is Saturday, except for Sunday, which is church.” (Anonymous)

My retirement journey has been full of ups, downs, and realizations. It is so odd to now be untethered from the ebb and flow of the school year. Truly, there are days when I couldn't tell you what day of the week it is, or even what time of day. I get up when I wake up and eat when I am hungry. No more trying to cram a decent meal into a 30-minute lunch period. No more sprinting down the hall to fit a bathroom break into a 5-minute passing period. No bells to tell me it is time to transition to the next class on my schedule. I'm having to figure out how to move through time in new ways. What can I now use to anchor myself in this time and place?

There are so many years and seasons to choose from: school years, calendar years, fiscal years, sports seasons, and church years to name just a few. Days, weeks, and months pass marked by different kinds of deadlines and celebrations. Looking back over the past four years, I realize we've also lived through Covid-time which seemed somehow not real - almost as though those months just didn't happen. There is a bit of that same sense of untimeliness to this new retirement time I am adjusting to. Because I am still doing the work of Synod Vice President and am very active in my home congregation, one thing that is starting to happen is that I am getting more in tune with the seasons of the church calendar. Sundays are the day of the week when I reconnect with the rest of the world. Although, culturally, our church tends to see September as the beginning of our programmatic year, and we have events like Sunday School Kick Off, we are actually still in the time after Pentecost, which for the liturgical calendar is also called Ordinary Time. Ordinary Time is a season of two parts. The first part runs from the end of the Christmas season to Ash Wednesday and the second part, the one we are in now, begins at the end of the Easter season and runs until Advent. The end of this section of Ordinary Time is Christ the King Sunday and is the end of the liturgical year. This year Advent, which marks the beginning of the liturgical year, begins on December 1. Ordinary Time is not called ordinary because it is plain or mundane. The name comes from the fact that the weeks are counted by ordinal numbers (the first, second, and third weeks of Ordinary Time, for example). Regardless, the time between the seasons of Christmas and Easter does seem a little less celebratory, a little more ordinary. The focus of the texts during this two-part season is the life and teachings of Jesus. The texts follow the everyday life of Jesus and the disciples: walking, fishing, eating, sleeping, attending weddings, visiting friends, telling stories - all those very human things that remind us that Jesus was fully human as well as fully God.

Although it is a bit challenging to reorient myself into a different way of marking the passage of time, I am sure that eventually I will fall into new rhythms. For now, though, it is nice to have an anchor in Sunday worship and the seasons of the liturgical year. From now until December 1, I will continue to look for the extraordinary in Ordinary Time.

Here is what I and/or the Synod Council has been up to in September:

- Synod Council: Met on September 21 at the Synod Offices. Among other actions, we appointed the Bishop Call Process Task Force and approved their proposed procedures and timeline. We also approved the formation of a new committee to review our stewardship and grants programs, adopted the Personnel Committee's proposals for compensation guidelines and a synod staff sabbatical policy, adjusted the current year budget to reflect the Synod Assembly's desire to bring our synod staff closer to the compensation guidelines, and proposed a plan for electing officers on non-assembly years.

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