

Synod Assembly

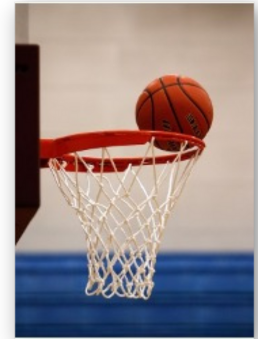
Rebound: From Worry to Wonder Bishop's Report



Part 1 Introduction

The theme for our 2023 Synod Assembly is Rebound: From Worry to Wonder. Rebounding is a skill a basketball player works hard to perfect. When a player misses a shot, it bounces off the rim, the player immediately moves, jumps to recover the ball and take another shot. A player's ability to rebound is as important as their ability to take a shot. Today we talk about rebounding as the ability to bounce back from adversity. As churches, many are still in the process of rebounding from COVID. The slow rebound has some worried. The worry and anxiety can actually slow down the ability to make decisions that will lead to a rebound.

The word worry comes from the Old English word, *wyrgan* which means "to strangle, choke, seize by the neck, wring neck, harass." I have seen church councils strangled by worry, choked on fear, wringing the joy, life and energy out of a meeting. I'm certain that many of us have felt a time or two when worry and anxiety about the future has kept us stuck and unable to move forward in God's mission. My hope and prayer is that we can all move from worry about what is or



WORRY: Definition
anxiety, uncertainty over actual or potential problems: cause for concern **ORIGIN** Old English-*wyrgan*, strangle, seize by the throat, wring neck, choke, harass, cause anxiety to

what was to wonder and seek God's will for what could be; to move from worry to wonder about what God is doing and be curious about how we can join in God's mission. For us to move from worry to wonder we need to simply TRUST, trust that God is God and follow where God leads us in faith. Our biblical base for the 2023 assembly is from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6 Do not worry... but seek first God's kingdom and righteousness.

I believe the great cause for worry in the church today is that things are not rebounding back to the way they were before COVID. So compounding that worry is grief. We are grieving what was lost in COVID. We want to go back but we can only go forward. I challenge us all to move forward trusting God with Wonder not Worry. Together let's wonder and ask God questions. We will not rebound, bounce back to the way things were, but we can bounce back better, bounce back changed. We will rebound by asking the God questions like: What is God's will for our future? How can we use what we have to make a difference in the world for God's sake? What can we do so that the next generation comes to know and love Jesus? What new way is God calling us to be the church in the future? What can we do to be in relationship and love our neighbors? Rebound: From Worry to Wonder-Jesus said, Do not worry...but seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness.

Part 2 Resolutions

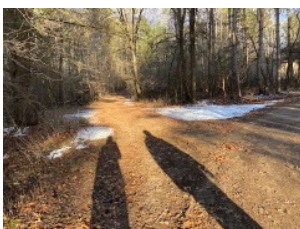
Our work as a synod is to help congregations to wonder and ask God questions. How do we work together so that the next generation comes to know and love Jesus and all generations experience God's grace and forgiveness in their lives? How do we love God and our neighbors? Over the last three years our synod assembly has passed several resolutions that asked those questions. The intent is that they will become teaching resolutions. That congregations and groups within the synod use these to engage in meaningful conversation and impactful action. We have been measuring the impact by using the annual report to the bishop as a measure of how pastors, deacons and SAMs are using these teaching resolutions. I am happy to report that they do seem to be moving the needle.

More congregations are engaging in conversations around these topics after the resolutions were passed. The synod council continues to monitor the impact of these resolutions. The effectiveness is dependent on the willingness of the pastors, deacons, SAMs and lay leaders in the congregation to engage them on a congregational level. I know that this is a big ASK of rostered ministers and SAMs. They are very busy and they have heavy weekly ministry demands. My prayer is that passionate lay people would step up and offer to use their gifts to engage their congregation in meaningful conversation and impactful action around these resolutions in the years to come. I am grateful for the work of the synod justice teams and synod ministers Pastor Sara Bishop, Deacon Lidix Montoya, and I especially appreciate Deacon Laura Ramlow's work editing the synod's *Just Act, Just Love* newsletter. Here's the link to the latest edition. [March 2023 Newsletter](#).

Teaching Resolution Questions from annual report to the bishop 2022	Percentage "YES" 2022	Percentage "YES" 2021
Does your Congregation have a green team?	30%	9%
Do you have members who might be interested in green team?		39%
Are you thinking about starting a green team this year?(36% said it wasn't a priority)	33%	
Are you RIC, did you or will you have a conversation in the next 6 months about providing a WIDER WELCOME TO LGBTQIA COMMUNITY	49%	37%
Would you like help getting started in the RIC process/conversation?	21%	
Did you take RACIAL JUSTICE TRAINING like IDI in last year or plan to take it in 2023 (2022)?	46%	(57%)
Did you have a conversation about racial justice or use the resources on the synod website about racial justice? Did you have conversation about loving BIPOC neighbors and the Racial Equity Statement for at least 1 hours	76%	26%
Does your congregation have a land acknowledgement?Note: 10% indicated that they have used one or are working on it.	5% YES 88% No	

Part 3 Reflections on the Synod: Holy Fork in the Road Conversations

What is our next most faithful step? That's the question I've been encouraging congregations to ask for the last three years. It is a Holy Fork in the Road question. Which path will we take? Where is God leading us? For many of our congregations this holy fork in the road conversation is about the things that most worry today's congregations. In the Annual Report to the Bishop, pastors, deacons and SAMs indicated they were most worried about:



- Membership aging, declining, worship attendance
- Leadership, volunteers, burn out, low energy
- Next pastor, interim pastor, staff
- Money
- Lack of youth and young families in worship, SS, confirmation

And of all the surveys completed this is how they described their congregations:

- Thriving/Growing-25%,
- Stable 61%,
- Declining/Dying 20%



As congregations face these issues they come to a serious fork in the road. They can decide if their next most faithful step is to grow to be a more sustainable, stable, thriving, outpost for mission. Do they have the energy and resources to take the hard road toward congregational vitality or do they need to take a different path and finish the work that God has given them to do and move toward closing their congregation?

Congregations that have the energy to move toward more vitality may choose to engage in a period of spiritual renewal, prayer, Bible study, dwelling in the word, listening to their neighbors, and intentionally asking God questions. A season of intentional focus on spiritual renewal and attention to the movement of the Holy Spirit is the only thing that truly revitalizes a congregation. After a season of prayer and listening to God a congregation at the fork in the road may choose to do many things. Congregations may look at options like these when imagining their next most faithful steps. I am grateful for the work that Liz Bartsch, Pastor Randy Olson and Pastor Diane House are doing to help congregations imagine their next most faithful steps. Pastor Diane House invites your congregation to have conversation with her about Faithful Innovations, a process that guides congregations in spiritual renewal. You will notice that at the very bottom of the list, the last option is to Close.[1] It is there because it is an option, and for some of our congregations it is the next most faithful step. If your congregation is at that place and has decided that it will take the path toward closure, please contact me and I will meet with you church council to discuss how best to take that step. It is an emotional and difficult path to take and does take energy and resources to close a congregation. It is best to make this fork in the road decision when the members and leaders still have the energy and strength to do the hard work of closing. As Jesus hung on the cross he said, "It is finished." That is tetelestai Τετέλεσται in Greek. Tetelestai means finish, completed, fulfilled, mature, accomplished, perfected. It doesn't mean failed. If your congregation closes it hasn't failed but rather it has brought to completion-accomplished all God had given it to do- finished and fulfilled its purpose.

Part 4 Pastors, Interims, SAMs, Seminary Students

The clergy shortage has become more noticeable in the last two years. In the NW Synod of Wisconsin, fewer pastors are available for settled calls or to serve as interims. At the moment there are 30 congregations without pastors and of those 30 congregations there are some that don't have interims, some being served by administrative interims, and some that are finding their own pulpit supply. In addition we have 25 congregations that are served by Synodically Authorized lay Ministers or SAMs. I am grateful for those who are serving as interims, especially those retired pastors who have stepped back into ministry and those who are serving as short term bridge pastors. I am very grateful for the ministry of our SAMs and those who are supporting them, specifically the Synod SAM Support Team, Pastors Randy Olson, Bob Giese, Greg Kaufmann and the synod's lay school of ministry. I am also grateful for the work of three seminary students who are serving as SAMs in congregations and attending seminary at the same time!

Synodically Authorized Ministers (SAMs)

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| • Alex Aakre | • August Hohl |
| • John Addison | • Michael Isaacson |
| • Todd Ahneman | • Bruce Metcalf |
| • Steve Aldach | • John Nedden Durst |
| • Heidi Bragger Kadinger | • Luke Pederson |
| • John Brunclik | • Tom Potterton |
| • Scott Burns | • Lyle Roe |
| • Jennifer Carey | • Travis Rogers |
| • Tiffany Chipman | • Andrea Rubesch |
| • Darrel Diers | • Jane Snowden |
| • Matt Dietsche | • Loren Teig |
| • Jill Fries | • Janelle Thompson |
| • Sara Gunderson | |

[1] Here is a link to our EPIC video Holy Closure: Leaving a Legacy. <https://vimeo.com/692167467> To be clear, I'm not suggesting any congregation close. I do not want your congregation to close. However if you feel it is time to finish this resource may be helpful.

Part 5 Gratitude and Opportunity

I am grateful for your partnership in ministry, all 196 congregations of the NWSWI together we are doing good work for the sake of God's mission in the world. I am particularly grateful for the amazingly talented synod ministers with whom I work each and every day. Please thank them when you see them! Synod Minister for Administration, Elizabeth Bartsch; Synod Advocate for Right Relationships, Pastor Sara Bishop; Pastor and Director for Evangelical Mission, Diane House; Deacon and Mission developer for Neighbor-to-Nighbor Lidix Montoya, Synod Minister for Leadership, Call Process, Candidacy, Pastor Randy Olson; Communications, Companion Synod Coordinator, First third of Life, Deacon Laura Ramlow.



With mixed emotions I need to announce that Pastor Greg Kaufmann, Assistant to the Bishop/Synod Minister for over 20 years is retiring on June 1! To celebrate his long faithful ministry in the synod, there will be a retirement party at Luther Park Bible Camp on Saturday, August 26 from 1-4 p.m.[1] He is currently the longest serving assistant to the bishop in the ELCA. Greg is a gifted teacher and energetic leader. He has been a wonderful ministry partner. I have learned so much from him. He will continue to teach and support lay school as well as volunteer with ministry teams. He has already volunteered to serve on the bishop's election committee for 2024! Pastor Sara Bishop who had been serving as Synod Advocate for Right Relationships with a non-stipendiary call will continue in that call but as a synod minister at .25 time.

Opportunities for Travel

Mark Twain, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrowmindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of people and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."

Join me on one of these trips to see for yourself if there is any truth to this Mark Twain quote!

- July 17-20, 2023 Rostered Minister's Gathering Phoenix AZ <https://www.elca.org/Rostered-Ministers-Gathering/Registration>
- July 24-27, 2023 Journey, Tri-Synod Sr. Hi Youth Gathering UWRF <https://nwswi.org/home/calendar>
- August 4-19 Malawi Companion Synod Trip
- November 1-5, 2023 Civil Rights Pilgrimage to AL
- January 8-17, 2024 Synod Trip to the Holy Land (12 spots left) <https://www.eliastours.com/tours/northwest-synod-of-wisconsin-holy-land-trip-with-bishop-laurie-skow-anderson>

[1] Save the Date! Greg Kaufmann's retirement party, Saturday August 26 1-4 pm at Luther Park Bible Camp.



Northwest Synod of Wisconsin
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America