Now faith, hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is



Dear Friends in Christ,

At the upcoming Congregational meeting on Sunday, February 10, we will be voting on three important things. I encourage all confirmed members to attend as we consider the following steps forward in our ministry.

- 1. Election of new council members.
- 2. Calling a second full time pastor who will have lead responsibility for youth ministry.

 This recommendation comes from our personnel committee with congregational input.
- 3. Passing of our 2019 operating budget.

This church remains healthy by continuing to share the love of God in Jesus Christ. We have amazing people in leadership and their ears and hearts are attentive to the call of the Spirit and the needs of the community. I am grateful for the gifts they bring to the work and life of our church. They are smart, insightful, thoughtful, careful, astute, attentive and giving of their time and talents.

Working together they have put forward a challenge budget, that is exactly what it says. It is a challenge. It reflects a significant percentage increase in expense and required income. We have identified a couple of new revenue sources including more grant writing and income from the use of our parking lot. Yet, the need for a commitment to increased giving through our offerings is significant if we choose to move forward with the recommendation to call a second pastor.

Thank you for all your questions and input at the budget forums this past month. Overall there is a thumbs up in moving forward with appropriating funds to call new staff. There has also been a commitment by our personnel committee to make sure whoever we hire is paid at synod guidelines with benefits. All this is fabulous! But the challenge remains.

Why another staff person for youth?

We have a preschool with 50 families. We have a scout troop with lots and lots of families. We have grandparents, parents, and youth asking for relational ministry that is tapping our existing staff to the max. We love our community and see the need for ministry to youth. This is a community outreach offering relational ministry to Jesus Christ.

Youth Director or Youth Pastor?

Our youth, families, myself and many in the congregation have lifted up the need for a dedicated staff person to provide leadership for our youth in elementary through young adult. In considering the overall staffing needs of a congregation our size in a community weighted with both retirees and young families, many in transition with the military, the need for another pastor dedicated for youth and families keeps coming up.

The personnel committee has weighed the pros and cons of staffing a youth director or youth pastor. Many members who don't have kids have suggested a second pastor. Many remember a youth pastor they had. Many have also spoken of the challenge with two pastors working together. I too have weighed that challenge and am committed to doing my best to working with an additional pastor. I think it would be a huge benefit to us and the community.

The cost?

The Synod guideline for a youth director is around \$55,000 to \$60,000 including benefits. The guidelines for an ordained pastor with up to four years experience is \$80,000. In weighing the needs of the whole congregation we are proposing we move forward and consider the option of calling a second pastor.

How might this work financially?

We always work together to make things happen—Your Offerings make a huge impact! Thank you! So lets take a snapshot of what this might look like: We have 121 giving units. Each would need to increase their annual giving from last year by an additional \$450.

How it happens when we work together:

I would love to help—but I have to reduce or stop my offering for a number of reasons.

I would love to give more but can't. I am able to give what I gave last year.

I would love to give more and can give an extra \$10.00 a month or \$120 more in 2019

I would love to give more and can give an extra \$20.00 a month or \$240 more in 2019

I would love to give more and can give an extra \$38.00 a month or \$456 more in 2019

I would love to give more and can give an extra \$114.00 a month or \$1,368 more in 2019

I love challenges and I am able to give a substantial increase over my current offering.

Please consider your giving for the coming year trusting that as we all work together amazing things happen. Everyone fits in one of the above. Together God uses each of us. Remember the widows mite (Mark 12:41). Every prayer, every gift, every talent given in faith and love with good stewardship brings in the kingdom.

Our last budget forum will be Sunday, February 3. Please contact our Executive Committee, personnel chair Steve Richards, stewardship chair Earl Gibbons or myself with any questions. I am excited about the future and I know we can rise to the challenge! - Pastor Deb Benson

OUTREACH MINISTRY

A Message from Pastor Deborah Butler

Saint Francis has told us to "preach the Gospel, if necessary, use words." Our preaching is done through our everyday interactions at work, at play, in the grocery store, on the road, in our family life. There are many ways we engage with our neighbors to further God's work of peace, justice, and hope making. Here are just a couple of examples.

JOSPHINE CARE COMMUNITY

Did you know that ALC is one of 19 churches in partnership in the ministry of Josephine Caring Community in Stanwood? For over 100 years local Lutheran (plus one Methodist) congregations have worked in partnership with the wider community to provide a "caregiving community for all generations" that includes transitional rehab, assisted



living, long term care, plus early learning and childcare (ages 0 through Elementary School), and partnership for congregational Care Teams. Supporting this helping ministry financially is only one way we participate. Volunteering to help with outings, reading, gift shop, arts and crafts, one-on-one visits, music, sports activities, building projects are a few ways to get involved. Check out the website for more information: www.josephinecc.com.

As a partner church, ALC has been involved in the work of Josephine Caring Community for many years. We are grateful to Jean Nelson who has served faithfully as our representative to the Board for a number of years. She is retiring, and if you think you might want to serve as our representative (normally one meeting per year), please contact the Nominating Committee. In addition, the Outreach Committee is working with the Chaplaincy staff at Josephine to enrich our pastoral care with shut-ins. You may contact Karen Tavalero if you feel called to this ministry.

COLD WEATHER SHELTER AT SALVATION ARMY

Another opportunity to embody the Gospel is to volunteer at the Anacortes Cold Weather Shelter located at the Salvation Army on R Avenue. Volunteers welcome guests, serve meals (typically prepared by local restaurants), and help the shelter residents set up and take down pop-up tents in The Salvation Army's Great Room. There are usually 10-12 residents in the shelter. As an individual, a family, or as part of a group of our congregation, we can make a difference for our neighbors in need. For more information or to volunteer, consult the website AnacortesColdWeatherShelter.com.

PRAYING FOR OTHERS

Prayer is a powerful way to help others, and every Tuesday at 1:00 p.m. Peggy White convenes a gathering in our Prayer Chapel/Library to raise up the concerns of our community for our community and the world. You are invited to be part of this expression of the Gospel at work.

These are just a small sample of the ways in which we preach the Gospel through our actions and our words. Together, we are making a difference in God's world!



Introduction to Centering Prayer

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23

10:00 am - 3:00 pm In Conference room #3

Facilitator: Pastor Deborah Butler

But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:6 (CEB)

Jesus taught that one way of growing closer to the heart of God, where we tap into the love that gives us abundant life, is through a regular practice of prayer. The fact is our days are busy and noisy and stressful. We hunger for peace, for calm in the midst of the storms of life. When we center our minds and hearts in God, who is the ground and source of all life, we find that serenity we desire. The practice of Centering Prayer, a method of silent prayer where we rest in God and are increasingly open to God's presence and action within us, is one way to grow in relationship with God and be grounded in God's *shalom*.

You are invited to an introduction to the practice of Centering Prayer on Saturday, February 23, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. in Conference Room #3. There will be a break for a brown bag lunch (drinks and snacks are provided). *Please sign up at the Welcome desk in the narthex.*

Pastor Deborah Butler will facilitate our introduction to this ancient practice. She has been commissioned for over ten years to present Centering Prayer through Contemplative Outreach, an international organization dedicated to fostering the process of transformation in Christ in one another through the practice of Centering Prayer.

All women of the church are invited to the

WELCA General meeting ~ FEBRUARY 26, at 1:00 PM.

This is our annual **BIRTHDAY PARTY** celebration day.



In addition our speaker for the day will be Calista Scott from the Diaper Bank of Skagit County. Diaper need (disposable diapers) is a consequence of poverty. The National Diaper Bank Network was founded by diaper banks across the US including one from Seattle.

Toward the end of the month families may need to make decisions between food or diapers. Diaper Banks exist to fill that need. In conjunction, the WELCA will hold a **Diaper Drive from Feb 10 - March 3**. You will find a place in the narthex to leave donations of disposable diapers. The biggest needs are larger sizes 5, 4 and 3. Diaper wipes may be left also.

We love our work through Lutheran World Relief to help across the nations. This is a way to support a local ministry for children.

ALC SENIOR ADULT MINISTRY PRIME TIMERS"

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2 - NO MOVIE NIGHT

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14 - POT LUCK BRUNCH In Fellowship Hall at 10:00 am

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 20 - TOUR OF NORDIC MUSEUM - VIKING EXHIBIT plus lunch

Meet in Conference Room #1 at 8:00 am

Please sign up at the Welcome Desk for all events



MARCH • F.A.S.T. #5 Members

Dave & Dorothy Biornson Ruth McDonald Kendra Kennedy **Bev Brooks Nevin** John & Diana Lindsay Les & Carol Olsen Susan & Malcolm McCutcheon Roselyn Payne Randy & Stacy VanSweden Stacey Pestar Boyd & Ginny Veer lo Rockwood Bryan & Linda Walker Julia Rogers Karen Tavalero Dave & Peggy White

Please, sign-up at the Welcome desk for when you are able to serve in MARCH
F.A.S.T. #5 Leader: Kathryn Parker
360-420-4940 / kmpbozeman@yahoo.com



Sunday, February 10, 2018 9:50 am

All Members meet in Fellowship Hall

Election of Officers Approval of 2019 Budget

USHERS - March 2019 - SCHEDULE

3	9:00 am -	Kenny & Anita Holzemer
	10:30 am -	Bill & Diane Gusa
10	9:00 am -	Tim Hofferth & Bud Rock
	10:30 am -	Les & Carol Olsen
17	9:00 am -	Rich Berentson & Paul Phelan
	10:30 am -	Paul & Julie Dusenbury
24	9:00 am -	Larry Thomas & Boyd Veer
	10:30 am -	John Parker & Randy VanSweden
		,
31		Chuck Landgraf & Scott Soes



MEN'S MONDAY Bible Studies

MONDAY Evenings - 5 pm In Conference room #3 Led by: Hoagy Kerr

MEN'S THURSDAY Bible Studies

THURSDAY Mornings - 7 am In Conference Room #1 Led by: Boyd Veer

THURSDAY Bible Study

THURSDAY - 12 Noon (For Men & Women) In Conference Room #I
Led by: Pastor Benson

MOM'S Bible Study

The second & Forth Thursdays in the month

February 14th & 28th / March 14th & 28th 9:30 am - 11:00 am In Conference room #3

Bible Study: "Finding I Am" By Lysa TerKeurst

Leader: Heather Harrington

MOPS-Mothers of Preschoolers

On the First & Third Thursdays in the month

February 7th & 21st / March 7th & 21st 9:30 am - 11:00 am In Conference room #3

Theme: Find Your Fire.

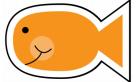
Leaders: Erin Kohlhaas, Jenessa Eelkema

and Challon Walker

Childcare is provided for both MOM's bible study & MOPS group. If you feel called to help with childcare, please sign up at the Welcome desk or call the church office 360-293-9586

Donations Needed for Church Nursery:





Please Bring to Mirth Moore or church office

WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY CIRCLES

Tuesday, February 12 Hannah Circle -10 am

Location: Conference room #3

Bible Study: Diana Lindsay

Hostesses:

Ruth Circle - 10 am

Leader Bonnie Kerschbaum

Hostess: Helene Fink

Anna Circle - 6:30 pm

Location: Conference room #3

Bible Study: Nancy Loftis
Hostess: Nancy Loftis



Flowers on the altar may be given in memory of a loved one, in honor of a birthday or other occasion.

Sign up on the Flower Chart in the Narthex or by calling the Church office.

PRAYER Team

Tuesdays 1:00 pm in the "Library Prayer Chapel".

If you have a prayer request or an update for the "Prayer List" please call the church office.

If you wish to join the Prayer Team call; Goodie Lorentzen 360-293-3669 or Peggy White 360-299-1184 SEWING NEWS - Faith Legan & Julia Rogers

We are Serving the Lord with Gladness~

We are busy gathering things for our Baby Care Kits, Personal Care Kits & Sewing Kits. We have lots of busy hands putting quilts together and tying.

NEEDED for Lutheran World Relief SPRING Shipment:

- 200—Receiving blankets
 Made out of flannel- size 36 X 36 (any color)
- 200—Bars of Bath size soap
 3.5oz / 4.5oz (Dial, Lever 2000, Ivory, Dove)
- 100—Toothbrushes
- 100—Bath Towels
 New or slightly used Dark Colors (No white)
- 100—Hand Towels
 New or slightly used Dark Colors (No white)
- 450-500—Diaper Goal
 (4 diapers go in every kit)

We have made over 250 Diapers so far!

Thank you so much for all of your help. We couldn't do all we do without your help.

Come & Join Us All are Welcome

Lutheran World Relief KNITTING NEWS Monday, February 18 from 1:00 - 3:00 pm ***At "The Market" Coffee Shop***again

> Our SPRING shipment GOAL is: Hats 50-75 Sweaters 50-75 Sweater/hat sets 60-100

We have COMPLETED:

- 12 Hats
- 0 Sweaters
- 28 Sweater/hat sets.

Our church usually ships 100-150 layette sets, each 6 month period. One sweater/hat set goes in each layette. Beginners are welcome & Teaching is always available. We use a fun, one piece sweater pattern.

Knitting location change for February
I Hope to see you FEBRUARY 18 at 1pm
At "The Market" Coffee Shop again
~Linda Anderson, 360-588-1730

WELCA Board Meeting

Thursday, February 1 at 10:30 in Conference room #3

FEBRUARY SEWING DAYS
8:00 am - 2:00 pm
Tuesdays
5th & 19th

WELCA General Meeting
Thursday, February 26 at 1:00 pm
in Fellowship Hall



SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

On Sunday, the 27th of January, the third graders received their youth Bibles in a presentation by Pastor Benson at the early service. These Bibles are a gift to our Sunday school students from the congregation. This year we were able to use Action team seed money from Thrivent financial to absorb a large portion of the expense. Our teaching staff represented our Thrivent Action Team. They were tasked with providing the children with lessons on how to use the bibles. We are asking the children to share their bible experiences with their friends in the community. By doing so, we hope to inspire interest in our Sunday school. The Children are encouraged to bring their bibles to Sunday school every weekend. We want to thank the teachers for doing their part, Pastor Benson for conducting a nice presentation, and it is our prayer that the Bible recipients will cherish these gifts always.

Speaking of sharing our experiences, the Education Committee would like to invite all of our congregation, especially our Sunday school participants, to do a little recruiting in the community. Our Sunday school numbers have declined somewhat. This is most dramatically evident in our preschool through 1st grade classes. We have a wonderful staff of Teachers and a great curriculum for teaching the kids about our faith. We need to utilize that resource fully. Please feel free to invite a family to our first service where they can send their children up to our Sunday school with the knowledge that they will have a good experience.

A final note about the Bibles; they were obtained from the Christian Book Store in Oak Harbor called "His Place." The proprietor has agreed to personalize each Bible for no charge if you would bring it in to the store.

"His Place" is located at: 350 SE Pioneer Way #103, Oak Harbor (360) 675-1430 Open: Mon-Sat 9 am— 6 pm

COMING EVENTS

WINTER CARNIVAL: February 24th

This years Winter Carnival will be held on the 24th of February from 3:00pm to 4:30pm in the fellowship hall. Note the large flyers posted here and there throughout the church. We are looking for volunteers to help with the games and there is a sign up sheet in the Narthex for cake bakers. There is no charge for attending and we encourage you to invite your friends and neighbors to join in the fun. We will have all sorts of games. The ever popular Jenga game, the famous cake walk, football toss, kick ball bowling, sandbag horseshoes, and many more. We look forward to seeing you there. Remember, this is an all church event; you are all invited.

PALM SUNDAY: April 14th

The children will be participating in the Palm Sunday frond procession at the beginning of each service. There will be Sunday school.

EASTER: April 21st

We will, once again, be having our Easter Piñata and an Easter egg hunt for the children between services. There will be **no** Sunday school on Easter Sunday.

Thank you all for your continued support of our Children's ministry.

Dave White / Children's Ministry



WORSHIP & FELLOWSHIP ASSISTANTS

F.A.S.T. Leader: Lane Phelan / paulandlane@comcast.net / 360-293-4290

ALTAR Setup: Grace Boggio, Norma Knutsen, Jenny Remmerden, Pat Wilson

SOUND Team: Jim Carver, Brian Hanrahan, Kenny Holzemer, Dana McCoy, Linda Millo, Mark Tanis

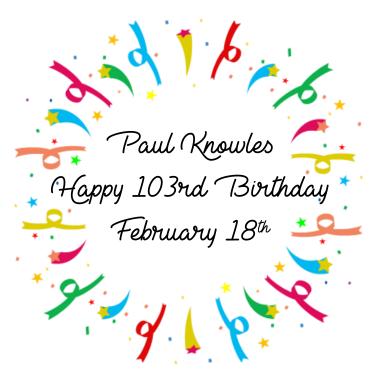
POWER Point Team: Michael Hanrahan, Anita Holzemer, Pat Carrie Smith

February 3- SCOUT SUNDAY	9:00 am	10:30 am	
Acolytes:	Erin Kennedy	Jacob Elling	
Ushers:	Thomas Knowles & Zephrin Ehrheart Rich Berentson & Bud Rock	Isaac McFarland & Cole Logan John & Kathryn Parker	
Greeters:	Wyatt Ott, Tristyn Connelly & Jackson Housholder	Logan Troy, Carter Eggleston & Nathanial Dickerson	
Announcements:	Harlan Eggleston	Tristyn Connelly	
Readers:	Cole Logan & Emerson Ott	Logan Davis & Harlan Eggleston	
Communion Assistants:	Judy Holmes & Lane Phelan	Jeaneen Brogan & Jeanette Christensen	
Coffee Serve/Cleanup:	Ryan North, Jacob Fry & Gavin Lawrence Lane Phelan	Jacob Fry & Tristyn Connelly Jeaneen Brogan	
Coffee Hour Treats:	Scouts	Scouts	
February 10	9:00 am	10:30 am	
Acolytes:	Ashlee Long	Madden & Reilly Nations-Pearson	
Ushers:	Paul Phelan & Scott Soes	Bill & Diane Gusa	
Greeters:	Gail Ebel Higgens	Bob & Ida Ford	
Reader:	Helene Fink	Anita McCoy	
Communion Assistants:	Patty Pedersen & Judy Pesaturo	Lane Phelan	
Coffee Serve/Cleanup:	Donald & Rachel Devine	Anita McCoy	
Coffee Hour Treats:	Judy Holmes, Patty Pedersen & Judy Pesaturo	Anita McCoy & Jeanette Christensen	
February 17	9:00 am	10:30 am	
Acolytes:	Reese & Breann Morgenthaler	Persephone & Joey Pestar	
Ushers:	Dan Khile & Larry Thomas	Les & Carol Olsen	
Greeters:	Tom & Pat Carrie Smith		
Reader:	Judy Holmes	Lane Phelan	
Communion Assistants:	Patty Pedersen & Judy Pesaturo	Lane Phelan & Anne Barry	
Coffee Serve/Cleanup:	Maury & Helene Fink	Lane Phelan	
Coffee Hour Treats:	Donuts	Donuts	
February 24	9:00 am	10:30 am	
Acolytes:	Kaylee Lust	Camryn Kerr	
Ushers:	Win Thompson & Boyd Veer	Paul & Julie Dusenbury	
Greeters:	Phil & Madelyn Case	Anita McCoy	
Reader:	Pat Carrie Smith	Sharon Fisher	
Communion Assistants:	Phil & Madelyn Case	Anita McCoy	
Coffee Serve/Cleanup:	Bob & Ida Ford	Sharon & Fred Fisher	
Coffee Hour Treats:	Madelyn Case & Ida Ford	Sharon Fisher	
	Birthday cake between services in Celebratio	n of Paul Knowles 103rd Pinthday	

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAY BLESSINGS TO YOU!

	DIKTI DELOGII		10 100.
ı	Laura Sullivan	18	Vera Harvey
2	Jeaneen Brogan	18	Paul Knowles
2	Janice Sullivan	18	Sabrina Poor
3	Howard Partch	19	Tom Paul
4	Justin Lust	19	Julia Soes
5	Bev Landgraf	20	Owen Peirce
7	Julia Rogers	21	Virginia Dusenbury
7	Wendy Atterberry	21	Michael Swietzer
7	Kelly Dunnington	23	Bill Christensen
8	Brianna Trafton	24	Sean Campbell
8	Hillary Young	24	Russ Hermstad
9	Hope Anderson	24	Carl Frantz
9	Enid Oates	25	Carin Fors
10	Ian Piacentino	25	Christy Giddings
10	Jenny Remmerden	26	Sadie Lust
П	Carol Olsen	26	Andrea Long
13	Corey Nibarger	26	Glen Sullivan
14	Dennis Giddings	27	Vance Frerichs
15	Chris Anderson	27	Ann Knutsen
16	Steve Fosso	27	Phil Latendresse
16	Erin Roux	27	MaryBeth Pollard
17	Garrett Kennedy	28	Hayden Long
18	lan Anderson	28	Sydney Long
18	Paul Dusenbury		

HAPPY February ANNIVERSARY!						
6	Paul & Lane Phelan					
8	Daniel & Jennifer Elling					
8	Steve & Linda Anderson					
18	Robert & DeAnna Claus					
21	Dorothy Engom & Bill LeDuc					
22	Rob & Alice Harstad					



JANUARY~Sunday Worship Attendance

	9:00 am	Nursery	10:30 am	Nursery	Total
6	101	4	108	2	215
13	101	5	86	0	193
20	100	I	77	2	180
27	123	0	88	0	211

BABY BLESSING

Arthur Joseph (A.J.) Phelan Born: January 21, 2019

Congratulation to the proud Parents;
Matthew & Taylor Phelan
Big Brother Michael
And Grandparents; Paul & Lane Phelan

ALC COUNCIL MINUTES summary - January 10, 2019

Attended: Hoagy Kerr, Pastor Deb, Lane Phelan, Melanie Sahnow, Faith Legan, Earl Gibbons, Stacy Pestar, Les Olsen, Jo Rockwood, Karen Tavalero, Kathy Khile, Steve Richards.

Absent: Dave Bjornson & Marcus Knowles

Hoagy called the meeting to order at 6:30pm and Pastor led Prayer. Hoagy led Devotions.

<u>Presidents Report:</u> Hoagy is getting closer to filling the position of Financial Secretary. A couple of interested people have stepped forward. The Nomination Committee is looking for new President, Vice President, Education, Youth, Preschool and Worship committee leaders. Also Delegates for Synod Assembly (May 17-19 in Lynwood), Josephine Caring Community and Lutherwood. Working on the legal form needed for payment from NW Orthopedic to rent park lot. The Budget drafts will be handed out for your review and we will discuss after both services on 1/13/19.

Our Congregational Annual Meeting will be on February 10th, 2019 between services at 9:50 am.

<u>Pastors Report:</u> Great attendance at Christmas Services and Dinner. Thanks to all for your service, support and participation. Prayers for our church secretary Rachel and family, as her Father passed away today. She is asking the council to plan their committee programs for the next six months. We will fill it out at our special Saturday February 23 council meeting.

<u>Treasurers Report</u>: 2018 Budget was not all spent. All the final expenses for 2018 will be paid this month.

Committee Roundtable

- Personnel Report: We have no new hires. Working on the Challenge Budget.
- <u>WELCA Report:</u> We us our funds: I/3 World Wide Mission, I/3 Local Mission and I/3 for the Church. Started Bible studies. Lane made motion to have a Diaper Drive (collecting baby disposable diapers to be given to the Skagit County Diaper Bank) Feb 10—March 3. M/S/P
- Education Report: Stacy found Baby Jesus stored above the sacristy. Stacy found a web-site to be able to print educational material for Sunday School classes. January 27th the third graders will receive Bibles. February 24th will be the Winter Carnival. Request for bible tabs in February or March.
- Property Report: The Church roof is missing some 3 tabs after recent high winds. Will be replaced. Moss on the roof needs to be cleaned and treated. Vacuum broke and we need to replace with new. Sanctuary fans were installed in the 80's and they need care and cleaning. Les would like to replace them while renting a lift and up there already. Will request funding from Legacy Endowment fund. Still working to resolve the Pre School railing issue with the City.
- <u>Fellowship Report</u>: John Parker & Kathy proofed the directory and have sent back for printing. Will be available end of February. Working on the Soup Supper for Lent which begins in March.
- Youth Report: Pastor Benson offering Lutherwood retreat the end of January.
- <u>Preschool Report</u>: Working towards becoming licensed by the State so we can resume our STEM program and offer extended hours beyond the 4-hour per day limit for non-licensed preschools.
- Stewardship Report: Budget prepared and will be distributed as Base Budget and Challenge Budget.

The next Council meeting is Saturday, February 23rd at 9am for Breakfast & 2019 Planning. Pastor lead the Lord's Prayer and closed the meeting at 7:30pm

Blessings, Melanie Sahnow

BISHOPS MESSAGE

Connecting the dots

By the Rev. Kirby Unti, Bishop, NWWA Synod From the FEBRUARY 2019 edition of The Spirit

I have thought many times about my trip last year to Standing Rock to stand in solidarity with our Native American brothers and sisters as they fight to protect their lands and waters. I will never forget how the Standing Rock people spoke of their sacred land. Their relationship with the land is very personal. They understand the earth is their mother. The soil is the womb of the mother. The rivers, lakes and sea are the amniotic fluid. They were there with tribal representatives from around the world not to protect their property, but to protect their mother's womb and the fluids that make for life.

It was so clear to me how they live in relationship with the land and water. Relationship for them is about seeing themselves as a part of the earth - not separate from it or in any way above it. Their relationship with the land is very mutual - each knowing they rely upon the other for their very existence.

Compare that to how we have treated the earth in the Western world. Often, we see the earth as an object that we are free to exploit. The earth is there for our use and benefit. It becomes our property and our possession, and we have monetized every part of it.

It is only in recent times that we come to the realization that we are severely harming the earth and may be pushing her beyond her capacity to heal and renew herself. The rate of decline of the polar ice cap and the increase of carbon dioxide into the air is alarming. We are noticing the damage in the rising of both temperatures and the seas. Our Lutheran Church in Shishmaref, Alaska is faced along with the whole town with having to relocate as the seas continue to rise. Luther would find this to be very disturbing because he believed so strongly that God

is embedded in all the creation - even in the tiniest tree. Just as we are called to love our neighbor, we are called to see the creation as sacred and to be in relationship with it. When we do not honor our relationships, we cease to live long in the land.

I am starting to connect the dots - I see that we in the West have not only become separated from the land, we have become separated from our neighbors. I believe this separation is one of the leading forces that is dismantling the church as we have known it.

In too many cases we no longer see our neighbors as subjects to be highly regarded. We see our neighbors as objects to be used for our benefit. Exploitation not only will destroy the earth, it will destroy the church and the communities in which we live.

Our Living Local movement invites us to overcome the gap that exists between us and our neighbors. The movement invites us to come to know our neighbors. It is all about entering mutual relationships of caring and serving together.

One of the classic definitions of sin is separation - when we become separated from God and neighbor and are turned in on ourselves. Might I suggest we all need to get our hands in the dirt and discover once again Mother Earth.

Might we care for her, deeply respect and honor her, and learn how to live in relationship with her. And might we come to know our neighbors, care for them, deeply respect and honor them and learn how to live in relationship with them. +BKU

