

JUST LOVE. JUST ACT.

JUSTICE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHWEST SYNOD OF WISCONSIN

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EAU CLAIRE WELCOMES EIGHT NEW AFGHAN NEIGHBORS

BY BEA EVANS

In early January, Welcoming New Neighbors (WNN), an ecumenical group of individuals in and around Eau Claire, expressed interest in becoming a refugee resettlement co-sponsor group with Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan (LSS). Typically, agencies resettle individuals within a hundred miles of their resettlement office. (LSS's office is located in Milwaukee.) However, these were not typical times. More than 43,000 Afghans were living temporarily on nine military bases in the United States. Thousands more waited on US

bases around the world until they could come to the U.S.

Mary Flynn, the LSS Refugee Resettlement Coordinator, agreed to consider a Welcoming New Neighbors plan to resettle Afghans in Eau Claire, if three conditions were met. First, the group needed to commit to resettling 3-5 families. Second, we needed to recruit enough volunteers to prepare for the arrival of our new neighbors as well as to support them once they were in Eau Claire. And finally, Welcoming New Neighbors needed to gather

pledges of financial support to assist with rent and other expenses until our neighbors were employed.

The plan we created with LSS to welcome Afghan neighbors to Eau Claire was approved on February 6th. Welcoming New Neighbors volunteers gathered at the Eau Claire airport around 9 p.m. on Wednesday, February 16. Many were meeting for the first time as discussions leading up to this point took place over Zoom. Shortly after 9:30 p.m., eight new neighbors stepped out of the jetway and into a new chapter of life.

During the first week or so, neighbors and volunteers focused on mandatory resettlement activities:

- Orientation by LSS staff
- Registration with DHS for Food Share and Badger Care
- Sign-up for phone service
- Open a bank account so checks can be cashed
- Attend English classes with Literacy Chippewa Valley
- Learn how to ride the bus
- Wait for Social Security cards and work permits

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Shortly after 9:30 p.m., eight new neighbors stepped out of the jetway and into a new chapter of life.

During that week and since then, our neighbors:

- Wonder about the future
- Adjust to Wisconsin winter and look forward to spring
- Maintain connection with family in Afghanistan
- Get to know volunteers



During that first week, WNN volunteers learned more about our neighbors. They

- are between the ages of 22 and 63
- have a wide range of English language ability
- have a wide range of backgrounds
- have a wide range or exposure to technology
- have a wide range of exposure to Western culture

A flurry of activities transpired since then:

- Three apartments were leased and furnished
- Social security cards and work permits were received
- Laptops were purchased for our new neighbors through PCs for People
- Health assessments are taking place
- Bikes, helmets, and locks were purchased for those who wanted them
- A couple of neighbors have taken their written driver's test
- One of our neighbors has purchased a car
- English classes continue for some
- All of the eight men are currently employed
- All of our neighbors are meeting with an attorney to file for asylum

So many churches and individuals have supported the resettlement of new neighbors to Eau Claire. Though much is happening there are still ways for you to help. Here are four to consider.

1. **Remember** our new neighbors as they begin new lives while continuing to worry about family and friends in Afghanistan.
2. **Champion** their resilience. Imagine the challenges of leaving everything behind and beginning a new life, in a new country where language and culture are vastly different from what you know.
3. **Learn** about Afghan culture. After all, it's the people who make a country, not the land.
4. **Become familiar with the challenges** our Afghan neighbors and others new to the U.S. face related to their legal status. Become an advocate for change if this is your calling.

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/afghan-adjustment-commentary>

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Bea Evans is the WNN Communications, Volunteer and Fundraising Coordinator. She also serves on the ELCA-NW Synod of WI Justice Team and is a member of Bethany Lutheran Church in Rice Lake.

THE "US" AND "THEM"

BY REV. GARY HEDDING

The Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, in assembly April 30, overwhelmingly passed a resolution encouraging congregations to enter into intentional conversations about race and love of Black, Indigenous or Persons of Color (BIPOC) neighbors. I was delighted the resolution passed but was dismayed when a person, who supported the resolution, and I talked about putting it into practice. He said that it might be tough to actually start the conversation in his congregation when “it doesn’t really affect us”.

I know what he meant by that. The people in the congregation are white and don’t experience racial disadvantages. In addition to that, they are unaware of BIPOC neighbors in their community, so it feels like a lot of uncomfortable conversations that are not relevant to their situation. In short, it feels like they are picking an imaginary scab.

Of course, that all depends on what they mean by “us”. If the “us” only contains the people in their immediate community of which they are aware on a daily basis, in other words white people, then the idea sort of makes sense. The question for Christians is whether the scope of that idea of “us” is one that would satisfy Jesus. The small boundaries for that understanding of “us”, of who “we” are, seems to be way too small for Jesus. It is the kind of identification of “us” that allowed the priest and Levite to walk past the man beaten by robbers in the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is the definition of “us” that the older brother uses in the parable of the prodigal son. It is the concept of “us” that scribes and Pharisees had that allowed them to be disgusted by and dismissive of tax collectors, sex workers, and gentiles. What has happened to “them” doesn’t really affect “us”, so we don’t bother with “them”.

It seems to me that the disconnect between the “us” that Jesus sees and the “us” that we, even unconsciously, see deeply affects our relationship with our Savior.

We will have these conversations because our “us” goes way beyond the prevailing ethnic demographics of our immediate community. Jesus has shown us that his beloved community includes people that we don’t bump into often. It includes people that we don’t understand. It includes people around whom we are awkward and uncomfortable. It includes all for whom Jesus gave his life and for whom he rose. When our “us” matches Jesus’ “us” and when our idea of our neighbor matches Jesus’ idea of our neighbor, then we recognize our stake in these intentional conversations about race and love of neighbor; then these conversations truly and deeply affect us. Participating in these conversations will prove to be the means that will inspire us to joyfully and obediently expand our “us” to Jesus’ “us”, so that we love our neighbors as Christ loves us. God bless your conversations.

PLANTING TREES

FOR THE SAKE OF GOD'S WORLD

BY BISHOP LAURIE SKOW-ANDERSON

"Taking it to the Streets: Becoming a Public Church" was the theme for our 2022 Synod Assembly. At the assembly we discussed what our next most faithful steps as Lutheran Christians in NW Wisconsin might be. Seven congregations received the "Bright Spot Award" for the ways they are taking their faith and their congregation public, showing up in their neighborhoods and communities with the good news of Jesus.

This year the award was in two parts, a donation was given to our synod's newest ministry, Neighbor-to-Neighbor - the ministry that connects our congregations to their Latinx neighbors - and the second part of the award was a TREE, a black hills spruce tree. Each congregation was invited to take the tree home and plant near their church building or at one of our Bible camps.

Video Bright Spot video stories here:
<https://vimeo.com/user/24278367/folder/9218127>

This year the assembly passed a Care of Creation Resolution encouraging every congregation in the synod to establish a Green Team to teach ways of caring for God's good creation at home and in the church building. Planting a tree is a great way to care for God's creation! Plant a tree for God's sake, for the sake of the world because trees...

- Trees soak up carbon dioxide reducing the amount of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere and slowing climate change.
- Restoring forests creates habitat for many species including endangered ones.
- By filtering storm water runoff and pollutants, forests reduce flood risk and protect the health of our waterways.
- Trees prevent wind and water erosion,
- Trees produce many products that are essential to our daily lives.[1]

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[1] *Planting trees—an easy way to help the environment* - TREE Foundation

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*On either side of
the river is the tree
of life with its
twelve kinds of
fruit, producing its
fruit each month;
and the leaves of
the tree are for the
healing of the
nations.*

- REVELATION 22:2



REBOUND YOUTH GATHERING

WILL INCLUDE A RACIAL JUSTICE COMPONENT

BY BISHOP LAURIE SKOW-ANDERSON

Registration is OPEN and the excitement is growing as more and more youth from across our three synods prepare to gather at UW River Falls for REBOUND.

High school students, youth leaders and bishops from La Crosse and Eau Claire, Rice Lake, Marshfield, Ashland Wisconsin; Marquette, Ishpeming, Iron Mountain, Escanaba Michigan will be joining together for the first Tri-Synodical Youth Gathering.

In response to the ELCA's understandable cancellation of the 2022 Gathering in Minneapolis, the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, La Crosse Area Synod, and the Northern Great Lakes Synod are preparing together to host a regional gathering for young people this summer. In the letter that was sent to congregations the planning team noted that our goal is to “create space for youth to encounter God in new and meaningful ways through creative ministry, challenging conversation, inspiring guest speakers and musicians, service learning projects in the Twin Cities, and uplifting worship experiences.” There will intentional space for students to process their experiences of these challenging last two years of COVID.

“Rebound will also include a multicultural youth leadership session - a time designed specifically for youth of color, or whose first language is not English, for the purpose of deepening faith, building relationships, celebrating culture, and empowering young leaders. We hope you will consider inviting high school youth to attend this event, and encourage youth of color to attend the multicultural youth leadership session!”

Here's the link for more details and registration! nswi.org/rebound
 I hope to see you July 25-27 at Rebound in River Falls!

CIVIL RIGHTS PILGRIMAGE

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING
AND FAITH FORMATION

BY BISHOP LAURIE SKOW-ANDERSON

You are invited to participate in transformational learning and faith formation experience, a Civil Rights Pilgrimage with the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin on November 9-13, 2022. The cost is \$1600.* A non-refundable deposit of \$160 is due by September 15. The balance is due on October 15. The cost covers airfare, rooms, ground transportation, entrance fees and some meals. Most of our time will be in Birmingham, Selma and Montgomery Alabama. Pastor Joanne Sorenson will be our guide. The size trip is limited to 14. Below is a list of some of the places that we may visit.

- Rosa Parks Museum
- Edmund Pettus Bridge
- EJI Museum and Memorial
- Greyhound Bus Station/Museum
- Civil Rights Institute of Birmingham
- Bethel Baptist and Dynamite Hill
- 16th Street Baptist Church/ tour memorial to the four girls
- Birmingham Jail and Memorial Park
- Southern Poverty Law Center/Civil Rights Memorial
- Montgomery State Capital

There will be two pre-trip zoom meetings that will be scheduled in September and October.

You can learn more by watching this brief promo video:

<https://vimeo.com/716091926>



These books and movies will give you a good foundation and are suggested before the trip:

Movies:

- Just Mercy
- Selma
- The Long Walk Home

Books:

- *His Truth is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope*, by Jon Meacham
- *While the World Watched: A Birmingham Bombing Survivor Comes of Age During the Civil Rights Movement*, by Carolyn Maull McKinstry
- *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, by Isabella Wilkerson
- *Stamped from the Beginning, the Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, Ibram X. Kendi

For more information or questions contact Bishop Laurie Skow-Anderson

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**To be transparent, the cost of airfare is difficult to predict and the cost of the trip may need to be adjusted slightly.*

RESPONDING TO THE NEWS

REFLECTIONS FROM THE
LUTHERAN OFFICE FOR
PUBLIC POLICY IN WI

BY REV. CINDY CRANE
DIRECTOR OF LOPPW

It is difficult to make any comments about justice right now without our hearts being pulled to Buffalo, New York and Uvalde, Texas. We barely had time to absorb the news about the racist attack leaving 10 people dead when we were faced with yet another mass murder, this time, of 19 children and youth and two adults.

Youth and their parents are left wondering about safety in their own schools and communities. Some of us are haunted by the refrain that gun violence is "an American epidemic," an "American phenomenon." In 2020, guns were the leading cause of death among Children and teenagers in the U.S.

In the coming weeks, Congress will be examining possibilities for increasing background checks, adding red flag laws, and banning assault weapons. Will the most recent mass murder make a moral difference to law makers in finding common ground? What does the ELCA have to say? Those are two of the key questions we at LOPPW pose when visiting law makers and engaging one another in congregations.

Along with building relationships with elected officials and seeking common ground on issues related to our priorities, we offer trainings on how to engage with one another as people of faith following our call to seek justice. We lead workshops on all of our priorities: hunger (look forward to information on the next Farm Bill), care for God's creation, anti-human trafficking, immigration reform, and juvenile justice. LOPPW also offers resources and consultations. In addition, we respond to crises, such as the recent ones in Buffalo and Texas, lifting our collective voice as the ELCA. As a ministry of the ELCA, we work closely with our national Witness in Society staff and elevate their efforts.

Please check out our website at www.lopww.org and our Facebook page (search for LOPPW). We also invite you to join our advocacy network at the bottom right of our home page. If you know high school youth, please invite them to go to our new Youth Advocacy page to share with us their interests in social justice and be placed on our list for future youth advocacy events; your very own Deacon Laura Ramlow is also a contact person.



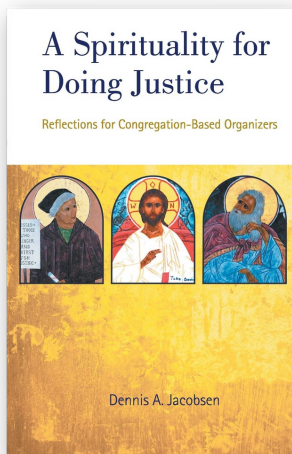
May our public voice reflect our solidarity with those most at risk of being vulnerable. And may you be sustained in God's love.

SUMMER READING

A Spirituality for Doing Justice: Reflections for Congregation-Based Organizers

by Dennis A. Jacobson.

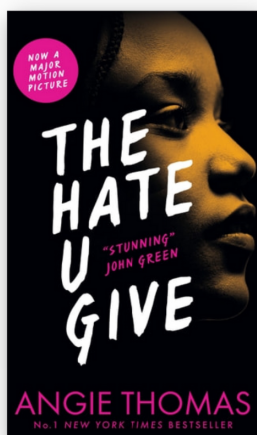
Jacobson was an ELCA pastor in Milwaukee for over 25 years, active leader in MICA and the director of the Gamaliel Clergy Caucus. His reflections on iconography are enlightening. I found chapter 6, Hagia Sophia, instructive. The second half of the book includes a daily office of scriptures, prayers and reflections.



The Hate U Give

by Angie Thomas

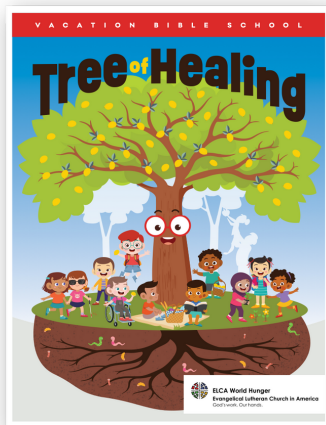
The Hate U Give is an audio book I checked out from the public library and listened to on my Libby Library App for some light fun reading! It is a novel about the life a high school girl after she witnesses a white police officer killing a black unarmed 16 year old boy.



ELCA RESOURCES

ELCA WORLD HUNGER VBS RESOURCES

<https://www.elca.org/Resources/ELCA-World-Hunger#VBS>



ELCA WORLD HUNGER GLOBAL FARM CHALLENGE

<https://www.elca.org/globalfarmchallenge>



ELCA WORLD HUNGER GLOBAL FARM CHALLENGE TO-GO!

<https://www.elca.org/Resources/ELCA-World-Hunger>



WISDOM FROM FLASHINGBIRD

SUBMITTED BY MAGGE ERICSON

Rob Gosling, Sr. (Flashingbird) from Red Cliff spoke recently on "Translating Ancient Teaching into Meaningful Life Experience." Rob shared this, about our connections:

"Teach your children what we have taught our children - the earth is your mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. This we know.

All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves."

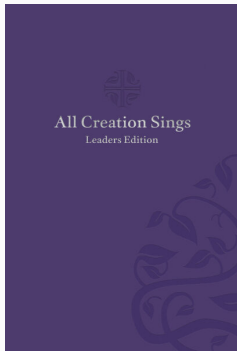
PRAYER FOR PEACE

FROM ALL CREATION SINGS
AUGSBURG FORTRESS, 2020
[HTTPS://WWW.AUGSBURGFORTRESS.ORG/PROMOS/ALL-CREATION-SINGS/](https://www.augsburgfortress.org/promos/all-creation-sings/)

You calm and quiet us, eternal God, as a mother holds her children close; all people have refuge in the shadow of your wings. Spread over us the shelter of your peace. Hold before us the wisdom of your cross, where we are drawn to you not by might or power, but by your boundless love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.



LAMENTING RACISM



FROM **ALL CREATION SINGS**

AUGSBURG FORTRESS LEADERS EDITION, 2020, PAGES 108-109

[HTTPS://WWW.AUGSBURGFORTRESS.ORG/PROMOS/ALL-CREATION-SINGS/](https://www.augsburgfortress.org/promos/all-creation-sings/)

This lament and prayer may be used in preparation for the work of faithful listening in discussion around racism and racial reconciliation, and at other appropriate times. The naming of communities, situations, and experiences may be adapted for the context or occasion. People of color may opt for silence during parts of the lament to contemplate the community's words.

Leader:

The sin of racism hurts communities of color, fractures human relationships, and denies God's good creation. Lament is a way for us to recognize the harm caused by racism.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:35-39), God's grace in Christ frees us for the difficult work of recognizing and lamenting racism.

We are all part of one body in Christ, called to act with equity, fairness, and justice. God's saving love creates grace-filled spaces within us and within our relationships. God's saving love calls and leads us toward rooting out the racism that continues to infect the body.

Within the whole human family, people of color have experienced both interpersonal aggression and structural oppression instead of abundant life. We recognize and lament the harm racism has caused to African Descent communities; American Indian and Alaska Native communities; Indigenous Peoples within Canada; Arab and Middle Eastern communities; Asian and Pacific Islander communities; and Latinx communities. We cry out to you, **hear our lament, O God.**

We have assigned the notion of race to human beings created in God's own divine image. We have judged God's beautiful diversity by our flawed and artificial standards. We cry out to you, **hear our lament, O God.**

We have used language and images in ways the equate *black* and *dark* with dirt and sin, and that fail to welcome the treasures of darkness in God's good creation. We cry out to you, **hear our lament, O God.**

We have accepted practices in our churches and in our society that privilege whiteness over diversity and equity. We have been complicit in how racism continues to exclude and harm people of color. We cry out to you, **hear our lament, O God.**

When one part of the body of Christ hurts, the whole body hurts. As we listen to people who are harmed by racism, we call to you, **open our hearts, O God.**

As we reflect on our daily interactions with people and communities of color, we call to you, **open our hearts, O God.**

As we reconsider what we have been taught about race and racism, we call to you, **open our hearts, O God.**

As we contemplate what we have done and what we have left undone, we call to you, **open our hearts, O God.**

As we labor to create a loving and safe community for our siblings of color, we call to you, **open our hearts, O God.**

Holy and merciful God, as your people we recommit ourselves to loving one another as you have loved us. Prepare us for this time of listening and discovery. We pray in the name of the one who has made us one, Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN

LAMENTING GUN VIOLENCE

FROM *ALL CREATION SINGS*

AUGSBURG FORTRESS LEADERS EDITION, 2020, PAGES 106-107

[HTTPS://WWW.AUGSBURGFORTRESS.ORG/PROMOS/ALL-CREATION-SINGS/](https://www.augsburgfortress.org/promos/all-creation-sings/)

Many Christian communities are newly seeking prayers and litanies for situation of communal lament. As need suggests, assemblies may join in praying one of these laments, either in the gathering rite in weekly worship, as a part of the weekly intercessions, or in a devotional setting. The opening petitions can be used

Leader:

Gracious God, by day and night we pour out our prayer to you.

We are crying out for justice, yearning for what is right, longing for your peace. Come quickly to help us, O God; save those who call upon your name.

(Any/all of the following may be used)

We hear of hateful violence and senseless killing....and your people cry: **How long, O Lord?**

We feel the suffering, sorrow, and shame of the oppressed....and your people cry: **How long, O Lord?**

We fear that justice will again be delayed or denied....and your people cry: **How long, O Lord?**

We recognize patterns of privilege and systems of discrimination....and your people cry: **How long, O Lord?**

We see your creation destroyed by carelessness and greed....and your people cry: **How long, O Lord?**

We weep for the victims of.....and your people cry: **How long, O Lord?**

We grieve in the aftermath of.....and your people cry: **How long, O Lord?**

We pray for an end to.....and your people cry: **How long, O Lord?**

We long for a day when.....and your people cry: **How long, O Lord?**

We learn of the death of [name/s].....and your people cry: **How long, O Lord?**

We remember the deaths of [name/s].....and your people cry: **How long, O Lord?**

God, giver of life, you intend for humans to live together in peace. In this time of grief over gun violence, we pray for your presence among us. That, trusting in your mighty and gentle healing, we may live in hope, we pray: **make us instruments of your peace.**

God of resurrection, we remember before you those who have died, [name/s] in [location of event]. We commend them to your eternal love. Grant healing and wholeness to the survivors who are wounded or traumatized, and restore all whose spirits are maimed by such violence. That we may serve as your arms of care to those in distress, we pray: **make us instruments of your peace.**

God of righteousness, you have laid on our elected leaders the responsibility to protect our land. Strengthen their devotion to our common life, and guide legislators to enact policies that address our plague of gun violence. That our government may support our search for domestic harmony, we pray: **make us instruments of your peace.**

God of compassion, we give you thanks for first responders, for police officers, firefighters, EMTs, and all who offer compassionate aid in situations of tragedy. Keep them safe from harm, and give them courage and sound judgement as they act. That we may join in support of those who risk their lives for others, we pray: **make us instruments of your peace.**

God of forgiveness, we ask your mercy on *the one/s who fired the weapon*. With your grace, transform those who from malice or illness inflict violence on others. Console their families. Believing in your power to make all things new, we pray: **make us instruments of your peace.**

God of the promise in word and sacrament, we pray for the church. Give us a voice, your voice, to plead for a society marked by justice and sustained by cooperation among diverse peoples. Train us to resist the lure of brute force. That by your Spirit we may become words and signs of your mercy, we pray: **make us instruments of your peace.**

God of true might and redemptive mercy, receive our prayers, and grant us to become your instruments of peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

AMEN.