

JUST LOVE. JUST ACT.

JUSTICE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHWEST SYNOD OF WISCONSIN

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REBOUND: UNSETTLED HISTORY. HOPEFUL FUTURE

BY BISHOP LAURIE SKOW-ANDERSON

OPEN INVITATION

You are invited to attend the 2022 Annual Winter Theological Gathering. This year we will learn from our Ho-Chunk neighbors from Black River Falls about the history of the First Nation people and the unsettling, destructive role the Christian church has played in it.

During this event we will learn from our neighbor's stories and experience the history with The Blanket Exercise and Talking Circles. Our time together will end with a hopeful word about ways we can move forward in the future and an Indigenous Worship Service.

Our guests speakers will be Larry Little George and Barbara Blackdeer-Mackenzie, members of the Ho-Chunk Nation, and Paul Rykken, historian and teacher from Black River Falls. Thanks to Pastor Jenni Hatleli, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Black River Falls for her support in the planning of this event.

WINTER THEO SCHEDULE

- 8:30 Coffee and Conversation

PAST

- 9:00 Welcome, land acknowledgement & introductions
- Doctrine of Discovery—Larry Little George

- History of the Removal and Boarding Schools—Paul Rykken
- Ho-Chunk Resilience: a Primer—Barbara Blackdeer Mckenzie

PRESENT

- 10:30 Blanket Exercise, Larry and other members of the Ho-Chunk nation

FUTURE

- Talking Circles
- Lunch
- Reparations
- 2:00 -Indigenous Worship with smudging, prayer to the four directions, and holy communion.

JUST LOVE. JUST ACT.

HELPFUL RESOURCES & PRE-WORK

I strongly recommend that all participants in this year's Winter Theological Event do the following reading and viewing before gathering on January 23rd:

Watch this 15 min TedTalk on the Doctrine of Discovery by Mark Charles:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOkqY5wY4A>

Read the ELCA's Five Declarations to the Indigenous Community

- https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Declaration_to_American_Indian_Alaska_Native.pdf?_ga=2.86926744.1284658179.1667839111-256581953.1608055964

Read this brief article about reparations made by a church in Madison, WI.

- <https://wisconsinwatch.org/2022/09/its-something-we-owe-madison-church-pays-voluntary-tax-to-indigenous-nations/>

Read a brief article by historian Paul Rykken about his connection to Bethany Boarding School.

- https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cloversites.com/0a/0a854394-3a19-4d9f-b1ae-f93021508921/documents/20221116131453074_2_.pdf

SOLAR ARRAY PROJECT

BY JOHN SKOUG

What started as a “big audacious goal” in late 2021, a Solar Array for our church, has turned into reality. In October 2022, the Congregation of Peace Lutheran of Pigeon Falls voted to approve the construction of a Solar Array. This article describes the rationale for the project, the high level process we followed, and key learnings along the way.

The rationale for a solar project can be communicated in both spiritual and economic terms. From a spiritual perspective, God calls us to care for creation throughout the Bible. By installing a solar array we will generate clean energy from the sun and will

lower the environmental impact (carbon footprint) of our church. In addition, the ELCA has long supported environmental stewardship and the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin has supported resolutions on creation care in 2021 and 2022. Finally, such a project is aligned with our Church ministry and purpose statement to “Love Jesus, Share God’s Word, Serve others.” There is also a very tangible economic benefit in that, unlike other capital projects, a solar array will pay for itself over time because the electricity generated will immediately reduce our monthly electric bill. The money that we save by not paying electricity costs, can be re-directed and put to other uses to further the church’s ministry. So this project is a win-win, spiritually and economically!

The process we followed was quite simple. We formed a sub-group (in our case 2 individuals) from our Creation Care team who were committed to investing the time to scope out the project details. We gathered our electricity usage over the past couple of years and we then reached out to local solar providers. We started from a list given to us by our power company, and along with web-searching, soon landed on five to contact. By early March, we had met with each vendor on-site to discuss our desires for a ground-mounted system design that could provide most of our annual electricity needs for our church. Each provider submitted written cost proposals outlining the number of panels, inverter configuration, potential array location and known incentives such as Solar-for-Good (through RENEW Wisconsin) and Focus on Energy, and an estimate of the payback period. We prepared a grid to compare the proposals and landed on two that were highly competitive; we called three references from each to gain further information.

By mid-August we were prepared to make a recommendation on which provider to select.

Throughout the “solar provider selection process” we were communicating updates to the Congregation. We used announcements during worship, newsletter articles, posted updates to our web site, and on Earth Day we had a mini-presentation on the status of the project.

Because the best location for our array was in the cemetery adjacent to our Church, we gathered feedback from the Cemetery association and we met with the Properties Committee and Church council in late May – both of these meetings were very valuable in gaining additional perspectives, opinions and questions to follow-up on, for example, related to warranties and service. We an all-Congregation meeting in late September where we outlined the rationale, the proposed design, the total cost (~\$114,000) and the net cost factoring in known incentives. Very importantly, the passage by Congress of the Inflation Reduction Act in August, which included a 30% direct payment to non-profits such as Churches like us, dramatically changed the financials for our project. The total of all incentives brought the cost down by over 60% to roughly a very manageable \$40,000.



Photo: <https://pixabay.com/photos/photovoltaic-system-solar-2742302/>

At the September meeting, it was requested that key stakeholders (Church council, properties committee and cemetery association) meet with the recommended solar provider to learn about their company and answer any final questions; following this successful meeting we held a Congregational vote in late October where the solar project was passed by a strong majority in a well-attended meeting of almost 60 members.

Our Creation Care team is very grateful for the endorsement and support of the Congregation. But gaining approval is one thing, execution, deployment and fund-raising is another. Now the real work begins! Please don't hesitate to contact the author (John Skoug) if your church is considering a solar project!

IDI SURPRISES

BY REV. SARAH S.V. BISHOP

I went into the Intercultural Development Inventory offered by the synod with a bit of an attitude. Okay, not an attitude but pul-leeze, inter-cultural development? I've lived all over the WORLD, I travel time zones at the drop of a hat, we lived in neighborhoods in our host countries not in expat bubbles or enclaves or on a base. NO problem, I can do this "training".

You should read all that in a sort of sarcastic voice.



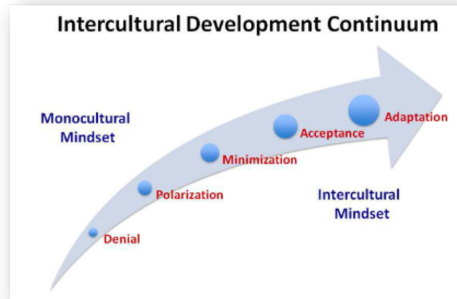
It's a two day class; with an online Zoom in between when you talk with the facilitator about your assessment. The class itself is about bias, what we expect, and don't expect.

It is described as "cross-cultural assessment of intercultural competence that is used by thousands of individuals and organizations to build intercultural competence to achieve international and domestic diversity and inclusion goals and outcomes." But that sells it a bit short. It is an assessment of what YOU think culture is, and how YOU perceive where you are in your understanding of living with cultures other than one's own. Can you see why I was feeling a little cheeky? That's been my life for the last 25 years, living and serving overseas, nine countries. NO problem.

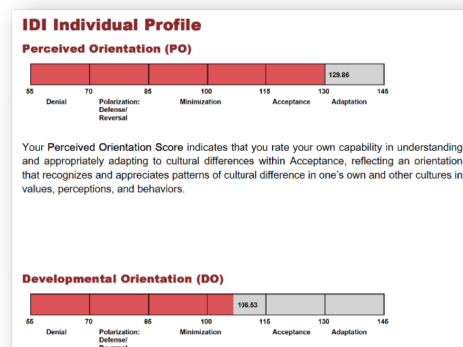
Going to the first class was a roller coaster in and of itself for mental health reasons not related to the class. I was in physical pain (we have got to work on our accessibility!), and I listened, but my ear way critical, not curious. I knew that. I kept most of my comments to myself, no one cares if I know this, it's not about me.

And then I went home and took the assessment. There's a spectrum of where you are on the cultural integration scale. I've taken the US Department of State version of this thing, several times. This was the thing that evaluates my mind set and skill set regarding cultural differences and commonalities.

The analysis talks about where we perceive ourselves, where we are developmentally, and the gap between the two. I was shocked at my results. I was a little horrified actually. I THOUGHT I was up there close to Acceptance; of COURSE I thought that.



But I am not. My initial response to this wasn't anger, or fear, but sorrow. So much is wrapped up in sorrow: I THOUGHT I was doing so much better. ... but better at what? That stopped me short. This isn't a good-bad scale. This isn't about moving from one end to the other. This is taking my temperature today, and today, I am in minimization. And I need to be. I need to be in a safe place where I can see commonalities and celebrate uniqueness and re-learn the skills of curiosity and wonder and inquisitiveness.



There's a reason they suggest that we re-take this IDI Assessment. And in talking with the facilitator, we had wonderful conversation about how that humility of not-being-where-I thought was a gift. I'm going to try very hard to push for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the synod, in a whole lot of ways, which will be an examination of our institutional culture as well. I wonder if there is a tool for that? And I wonder what the difference is between how open and welcoming we SAY we are, versus what we are actually doing.

THE JOURNEY OF LEAVING THE STYROFOAM WORLD

BY MAGGE ERICSON

For years at Saron Lutheran, the china service was used... then the pandemic arrived, and several of us felt it would be good to go to disposable. There was Styrofoam, but that was not good for the environment. A plan was made to use it but not replenish and start to use compostable items such as coffee cups, silverware, and dinnerware. For funeral service receptions, for example, families can make a choice, to use china or compostable. The committee alerted the funeral homes that were providing food and other items that Saron has gone to the compostable "world". Again acceptance and good comments.

Saron reached out to Northland College which had an industrial composter that was available for commercial and residential use. The small committee researched and found a good source on composting in Wisconsin, <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Recycling/Compost.html> in the research it was learned, grass clippings, yard waste cannot go to the landfill in Wisconsin. In this website, it gave all the information that the group needed to proceed with an article in the church monthly newsletter, and Sunday bulletins.

After being contacted by Northland College that there would be a change in who would be picking up the container of compostables, it was decided to continue with weekly pick up by Big Lake Organics. The cost for annual pickup is around \$200. There are becoming more facilities that are doing pick up services; the DNR site has a list of towns where there are composting services.

We have many in our congregation that have backyard composting areas so the adjustment was pretty smooth. We have members who have the white container from Northland College, that once filled bring it back to Northland College for a clean bucket, with lid. There is a sign to remind folks what is acceptable in the compostable green-bagged trash cans. In fact, our kids often let the adults know what should be in the compostable can!

DEI TRAINING

BY REV. SARAH S.V. BISHOP

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is everywhere. Or rather, it isn't everywhere enough, so businesses, schools, non-profits, are asking that people be trained in this area, and like a Chief Executive Officer, or Chief Financial Officer, a CDO or variation thereof, is becoming just as necessary, because working towards belonging, in a LOT of ways, is not easy, and takes commitment. It used to be one person's job, maybe in addition to their 'real' job, but more and more it is becoming necessary to do this full time, with a team, and include both people IN the organization, and outside of it as well. Culture is changing.



Even more interesting, and somewhat incomprehensible sometimes, people don't like ticking a BOX as to where they want to be counted – married or single or divorced for instance. A lot of times, we can't click a single box, because we (I was born in 1969, which is ... Gen X? Between Baby Boomers and Gen Z?) don't fit in one single box anymore. Multicultural identity is quite common, even if we don't see it so very much where WE are, it is there, and it is going to become more common. How can we get ready for that?

In the not too distant future, we'll take our temperature – we'll discuss and decide if we want to figure out where we are, and where we want to be. THEN we'll figure out how to get there. It's a long haul. This is not a program that you can put in place and call it done. Even women are still fighting for pay parity (to be paid the same as their male colleagues), so DEI is like brushing your teeth.

But engaging in the full potential of the individual – a place where innovation thrives, and we respect each others views, beliefs and values – is so very Lutheran. It is a step towards living in right relationship with ourselves, our neighbors (of all types, not just humans), and our Creator. The Old Testament and the New Testament both command us to do this kind of work, culture is just catching up, and fortunately for me, providing training to learn how to do so!

“By 2024, Millennials and Gen Z voters will outnumber voters who are Baby Boomers and older, 45/25. We are beginning to see the political impacts of that generational shift.”

THE PRIVILEGE OF SPEAKING ENGLISH WITH A MIDWESTERN ACCENT

BY REV. GARY HEDDING

I never thought much about the privilege of being raised in Minnesota with a white midwestern accent. It was just what everyone I knew was speaking. National news people and game show hosts spoke with a midwestern accent, even if they were broadcast from the west or the east coast. Movies tend to have people speak in the same midwestern accent, unless, of course, they have foreign or “ethnic” characters. On internship, in Brooklyn, NY, the kids would sometimes make fun of my accent but they never had any trouble understanding me. Even my son-in-law, born and bred in Texas, has a midwestern accent thanks to parents from Iowa and Indiana.

I grew up thinking this was normal speech and other regional accents within the country were curious and interesting, but unusual and, sometimes, inconvenient.

I discovered what an enormous privilege it is while serving on the board of the Eastside Ministerial Alliance (EMA). The EMA is a community development organization established by seven African American congregations in Waterloo, Iowa. The board was made up of 8 or 9 African American pastors, all but one who had their roots in the Deep South, a white Episcopal deacon and me. In the eight years I was part of the EMA I had to develop an ear for accents from Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana with distinct Black sub dialects. It was an immersion experience, and after a while I learned to hear it pretty well. I never tried to mimic it myself – of necessity Black pastors were all fluent in understanding my accent, and, like me, they didn't feel it was necessary to mimic my accent among ourselves.

The privilege became clear when the EMA was competing for a \$100,000 grant from the foundation of a local hospital. The hospital was interested in giving the grant to an African American organization and had given the EMA smaller grants in the past. We even partnered with the hospital in an evening free clinic at the EMA site. We had the inside track. Applicants took part in an interview with the hospital CEO, Foundation director and Foundation president, all white midwestern speaking people. We were familiar with them all. The EMA was represented by the executive committee; three Black pastors, all from the Deep South, who served as president, vice-president, treasurer and midwestern me as secretary. As the interview got going, I noticed that more and more of the questions were directed to me. I redirected policy questions to the president, operational questions to the VP, and financial questions to the treasurer.

Questions started to be repeated. It was odd because race had never been an issue in other negotiations with these staff people. But then, it hit me. The grant was \$100,000. The hospital folks would have to account for how it was being spent and they needed to be absolutely clear about how the EMA was going to spend it.

The hospital folks weren't used to the dialects being spoken – except for mine. And it was \$100,000. T's needed to be crossed and i's needed to be dotted and it wasn't happening. Clarity was not being achieved – oh, and it was \$100,000. Everyone was getting frustrated because the hospital people weren't understanding the other EMA pastors and, did I mention that there was \$100,000 on the table? I slid another question from me to the president and the president gave me a look that said, "Forget the propriety, we want the money, just answer the question". So, I answered a bunch of questions with my privileged dialect, clarity was achieved, and we got the money.

Racism isn't only about color. There are a number of characteristics that can identify race; dialect, gestures, tone of voice and volume can be some of those. Add in a lack of familiarity with words, phrases, and pronunciations, understanding can be hard to achieve. The more consequential a conversation is, the more a midwestern accent among midwesterners is an enormous privilege. I inherited that accent, I didn't have to work at it, and that day I was glad I could use it for the EMA, but I was sad and angry that I had to do it so that the EMA could be trusted with \$100,000.

CIVIL RIGHTS PILGRIMAGE

BY REV. SARA S.V. BISHOP

This past week I went on the Civil Rights Pilgrimage offered by Joanne Sorenson and In Our Hands Adventures.



A pilgrimage is a journey, often into an unknown or foreign place, where a person goes in search of new or expanded meaning about their self, others, nature, or a higher good, through the experience.

And twelve ministers (of several types, not just pastors) from the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin found ourselves sleepily checking in at the Minneapolis airport, at 5am on a coldish November morning. Fortunately the coffee shop was open after passing through security. I'm not sure what we expected, but it was powerful. I was worried that it was going to be touristy – ticking civil rights boxes – but it was nothing like that.

We did go to museums, interpretive centers, shrines to be frank, and historically important locations – but the travel planning, and the locations themselves, were set to allow time to process some really heavy information, as compassionately as possible (Full disclosure, I didn't make it past the second room of the Legacy Museum – my empathy was too high, my existing knowledge already too deep, and my emotional filters way too low).



There are things we still need to learn. There are things we THINK we know, that are slightly off ... in favor of the dominant culture, minimizing the marginalized just a bit ... but those bits add up. I had always heard that Rosa Parks was just tired, and so didn't get up. But no, Mrs. Parks was well trained; she knew exactly what she was doing and how to do it. She quietly said no twice, and when the driver said that he was going to call the police, she said, "You may do that," giving him permission, practicing her civil disobedience and non-violent resistance training to the utmost.

We went to Montgomery, seeing the Legacy Museum and Southern Poverty Law Center with its museum and memorial. Rosa Parks' museum had a very fun side for children, which we unabashedly also went to.

The steps of the capital are where both the Confederacy rose, where Jefferson Davis was sworn in after the southern states seceded; and also where Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a speech after marching from Selma, AL – 100 feet and 100 years apart. We saw MLKs first call parsonage and sang in the church and said words from the pulpit.



Most of the group walked the bridge in Selma, we had another most wonderful guide, with whom we shared amazing barbeque afterwards. Birmingham had museums, churches, including the 16th Street Baptist church where we were treated to a rousing sermon, and talked with a classmate and friend of the four girls who were killed by the 61st bombing of that year. 61.

There are things we still need to learn, we are not done. Five stars, highly recommend.

ECOFAITH NETWORK

BY REV. KAREN BEHLING

Our network of creation care resources is growing thanks to an invitation from the Northeastern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA to our synod to connect with the EcoFaith Network. For many years, our NE MN neighbors have been working together and curating a treasure trove of resources for equipping congregations in this important, ongoing work.

To explore the resources available through the EcoFaith Network, go to:

- <http://www.nemnsynod.org/ecofaith.html>

From this website, you can sign up to receive the Green Blades Rising Newsletter. Within this monthly newsletter, preachers will also find the Green Blades Preaching Roundtable which offers reflections on the ecological echoes, implications, and intersections of each week's texts in the RCL. To receive these preaching helps weekly, contact Kristin Foster, editor at revkristinfoster@gmail.com

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO KEEP AWAKE?

Welcoming the Savior in the Way We Treat Creation.

BY REV. GREG KAUFMANN

FROM THE GREEN BLADES PREACHING ROUNDTABLE

Reflections from Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122, Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

These reflections were written right on the heels of several devastating hurricanes, and just prior to the November elections in the United States. Our Gospel reading for Advent 1 urges us to “keep awake.” What does that look like, almost 2000 years after the Gospel of Matthew was written? As I meditated on the assigned texts for Advent 1, I used that question to focus my thoughts.

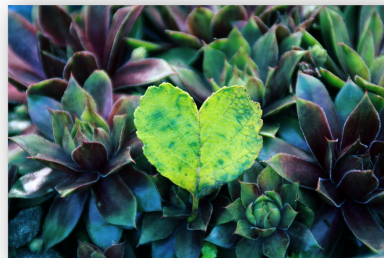
Scholars often note that Matthew’s gospel has organized Jesus’ teachings into 5 distinct blocks of material, with our Advent 1 text as part of the 5th and final teaching block. Using several parables, Jesus urges his followers to “keep awake” and “always be ready” since we don’t know when the Son of Man is coming. In case his original auditors, or current readers, wondered just what “keeping awake” or “always being ready” looks like in real life, Matthew spells it out in chapter 25, which concludes with the famous parable popularly known as “The Sheep and the Goats.” You keep awake and are always ready, by living out your faith serving those that are always on the margins – poor, stranger (read immigrant), hungry, thirsty, sick, imprisoned etc. The more I thought about this list, the more it reminded me of the 8th century prophets, and their critique of Israel and Judah. More on that in a minute.

Based on the almost unanimous consensus of the scientific community, you could add our planet to that list now. To connect it more directly to our Gospel lesson, we also know that the first groups impacted by climate change are those least able to cope with it. How do we serve a planet that has been degraded by centuries of human plundering? What might it look like to serve God by serving the environment?

I mentioned the 8th century prophets above, and Isaiah is one of the four canonical written 8th century prophets. In chapter 1, Isaiah attacks worship (no matter how well done) devoid of justice, and declares that God simply can’t endure it any longer! He calls for the nation to “cease to do evil and learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” Isaiah 1:16b-17

“*The “big 5” markers of a nation’s health and faithfulness is how these groups are treated: poor, powerless, widows, orphans and immigrants. I’ve been wondering if today we need to add one more – the planet!”*

For a deeper dive into the prophetic critique of Israel and Judah, and by extension, us, here is a list of passages you will want to explore: Deut. 10:17-19; 1 Sam. 15:22-23; Psalm 146; Prov. 14:31; Prov. 15:8; Prov. 21:3; Isaiah 1:23; 3:13-15; 10:1-2; 58:1-14; Jeremiah 7:1-26; Hosea 6:4-6; 8:11-13; Amos 5:21-25; Micah 6:8; Zech. 7:9-10; 14:21. The “big 5” markers of a nation’s health and faithfulness is how these groups are treated: poor, powerless, widows, orphans and immigrants. I’ve been wondering if today we need to add one more – the planet!



Our text from Isaiah 2 follows, and imagines that “In the days to come” the nations will stream to Jerusalem in order to be taught God’s ways, and that weapons of war will be converted to farming implements.

What might God’s ways look like in regard to God’s creation?

The Biblical perspective of the world is that it is God’s and that Jerusalem/Mt. Zion/temple is merely the footstool where God’s presence is most keenly experienced. Psalm 122 urges its auditors to seek the good of Jerusalem for the sake of “my relatives and friends.” What might that look like if we took Psalm 24 seriously, which declares that “the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it...”

There is indeed a price to pay for choosing to regard this planet as God’s, and make personal and national changes to slow down or reverse the climate degradation that has happened over the past centuries. But our reading from Romans 13 gives us courage and reasons for making these changes. Paul writes that since salvation is near, believers can risk setting aside our own personal comforts and desires, and put on Jesus Christ!

How do you think Jesus Christ would choose to act in this world? How do you think Jesus Christ would choose to treat this world? How do you think Jesus Christ would respond to the scientific communities’ call to change how we treat this planet?

There is indeed a rich feast offered us this first Sunday in Advent. It is indeed a time to prepare to welcome once again the Savior into our midst. What better way than to treat God’s creation with the same reverence God does!

CARE OF CREATION TEAM

BY REV. KAREN BEHLING

Would you like to connect with others who are committed to working together to care for creation? Do you have ideas or expertise to share beyond your congregation? If so, the Synod Care of Creation Team would be delighted to welcome both lay and rostered leaders into our next conversation!

To receive the zoom link, please contact Pastor Karen Behling at: karenraskbehling@gmail.com

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS RESOURCES

*Connections With Creation**

DECEMBER 4 SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Trees appear in all three readings this week: the axe at the roots, a shoot from the stump, a root that rises. These tree images evoke ecological relationships between wounding and healing, growth and ruin, death and life. Indeed, in a forest one may notice how many new trees are sprouting from stumps or fallen, decomposing trunks. Forest ecologists teach that a tree's life span can be roughly divided into thirds: a third as a growing and living tree, a third having died and still standing, and a third fallen and serving as a nurse log for newly emerging trees and plants. While John's axe threatens, Jesus in his death on the tree becomes a nurse log for the world. Exploring a forest and noticing how many trees are growing from older ones that have died, one may wonder if every tree is a shoot from a stump of Jesse.

DECEMBER 11 THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

This week's readings imagine the wilderness becoming a place of healing and justice. While contemporary dominant cultures have often characterized wilderness as the opposite of human society, Indigenous wisdoms and biblical perspectives do not strictly segregate "nature" and "culture." Increasingly, urban planners, medical professionals, and activists point to the health and equity benefits of "rewilding" human communities. The presence of trees and wild spaces in neighborhoods reduces family violence, raises academic test scores, and improves mental health. Simply walking through natural areas in cities produces mental states that are similar to prayer and meditation. Trees help cool city blocks overheated by a carbon-fueled climate. Jesus makes clear that John the Baptist's preaching is not the standard urban planning of the palaces.

It emerges from the fertile place where wilderness meets city, calling for equity and justice throughout the land—perhaps an image of what we now call environmental justice.

DECEMBER 18 FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

The fundamental cycle of mammalian life—gestation and birth—is a key image in today's readings. In the New Testament, the significance of Jesus' birth is more a theological truth ("in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell," Col. 1:19) than a biological anomaly.

The wonder of a "virgin birth" is an established pattern in nature. Formally known as parthenogenesis, it has been scientifically witnessed among birds, reptiles, insects, and fish. However, the more common cycle of conception and birth is itself a holy wonder, a sacred sign: in today's readings it is a sign of God with us in the ongoing, evolving cycles of our creaturehood. "The Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel [God with us]" (Isa. 7:14).



DECEMBER 24 NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, CHRISTMAS EVE

"Joy to the earth" is not just a rhetorical flourish. Modern science is beginning to recognize what traditional spiritualities have long known: that nonhuman creatures experience joy. Many of us have seen pets exhibiting joy at a meal, at a river, or even simply because we've returned home to them. Elephants trumpet in chorus at the birth of a newborn. Chimpanzees sometimes dance when they encounter a waterfall. Even trees send signals to each other of their need or well-being. "Just to be is a blessing," wrote Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Joy for this blessing of being trumpets, barks, dances, meows, sings, and waves its limbs across the earth. In Psalm 96 and its hymn paraphrase "Joy to the world" (ELW 267) we are part of a cosmic choir in which "heaven and nature sing" for joy at the wonder of the incarnation, God's bodily presence with us in our creaturehood.

DECEMBER 25 NATIVITY OF OUR LORD: CHRISTMAS DAY

Did you witness sunrise this Christmas morning? For those of us in the northern hemisphere it rose far to the south on our eastern horizon, and it will track low across the sky until the end of this short winter day. The sunrise will now daily creep further north. If you missed it, you will have another chance to find the place of the Christmas morning sunrise—well before next Christmas. In June, on the commemoration of John the Baptist just as the sun sets in the west, the long shadows will point across the landscape to the southeast, to the point on the horizon where the sun rises on Christmas Day. John the Baptist—like the church through the ages—points to the coming Messiah, and our ancestors in faith arranged our festival days so that the cosmos would continuously resound with expectant joy at Immanuel, God with us.

*[*From Sundays and Seasons; Augsburg Fortress, 2020. Minneapolis, MN]; Shared with us by the EcoFaith Network of the Northeast Minnesota Synod via the Green Blades Rising Newsletter.*

SYNOD CALENDAR OF EVENTS

WINTER THEOLOGICAL EVENT

Rebound: Unsettled History. Hopeful Future

January 23, 2023

Luther Park Bible Camp - Chetek

A Conversation about right relationships with our Ho-Chunk neighbors.

Info & Registration can be found here:

<https://nwswi.org/winter-theological>

CHRIST JAM: MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH GATHERING

February 11, 2023

Bethany Lutheran - Rice Lake

For all 6-8th graders!

DUE DATE FOR ANNUAL REPORT TO THE BISHOP, MISSION SUPPORT FORM, AND PAROCHIAL FORMS A&C.

February 15, 2023

WALKING TOGETHER

Rebound: From Nostalgia to New

March 11, 2023

Bethany Lutheran - Rice Lake

IMMERSION EXPERIENCE TO PINE RIDGE RESERVATION, SOUTH DAKOTA

Host: Journey House Campus Ministry

March 12-18, 2023

Lutheran Campus Ministry - Stout and The Vine NYC will also be attending during this week.

NWSWI YOUNG ADULT SERVICE

**LEARNING TRIP TO ALBUQUERQUE,
NEW MEXICO**

Host: Northwest Synod of Wisconsin

March 18-25, 2023

Information and Registration here:

- <https://nwswi.org/young-adults>

YOUTH IN ADVOCACY RETREAT

LOPPW + 6 Synods

April 14-16, 2023

Madison, WI

SYNOD ASSEMBLY

Rebound: From Worry to Wonder

April 29, 2023

Bethany Lutheran - Rice Lake

ELCA ROSTERED LEADERS GATHERING

Rekindle the Gift Within You

July 17-20, 2023

Phoenix, Arizona

JOURNEY: TRI-SYOND HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH GATHERING

JULY 24-27, 2023

UW River Falls

Details can be found here:

<https://nwswi.org/journey>

SYNOD TRIP TO MALAWI

August 4-20, 2023

FALL MINISTRY RETREAT

September 2023

Heartwood Conference Center

CIVIL RIGHTS PILGRIMAGE

November 1-5, 2023

Alabama

LAY SCHOOL OF MINISTRY

2022-2023 THEME: PUBLIC WITNESS

September - May

Hybrid and Zoom Options

Information and Registration here:

- <http://layschoolofministry.org>

Guest Lecturers can be found here:

- <http://layschoolofministry.org/LSMConEd22-23.pdf>

SYNOD TRIP TO THE HOLY LAND

July 8-17, 2024

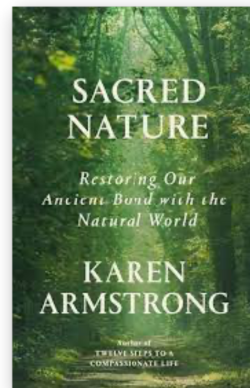
Details can be found here:

<https://www.eliastours.com/tours/northwest-synod-of-wisconsin-holy-land-trip-with-bishop-laurie-skow-anderson>

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

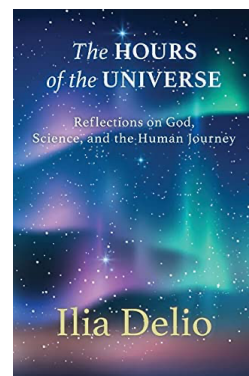
Sacred Nature: Restoring our Ancient Bond with the Natural World

By Karen Armstrong (2022)



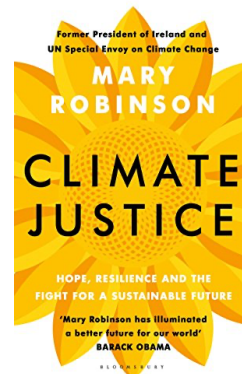
The Hours of the Universe: Reflections on God, Science, and the Human Journey

By Ilia Delio (2021)



Climate Justice: Hope, Resilience, and the Fight for a Sustainable Future

By Mary Robinson (2018)



Northwest Synod of Wisconsin
Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
God's Work. Our Hands.