



January 3, 2024

New Year's Greetings to you who are part of the Body of Christ in the Montana/N. Wyoming Synod, ELCA! Welcome to 2024!!

As I reviewed my annual report letters from the previous four years, I noticed a common theme – Change! Transition! Adapt! I'm guessing some of you are getting tired of all the talk about change and calls to adapt, and would just appreciate some stability right now. Others of you may be hoping and praying for more change or at least certain kinds of change to come to your lives, your congregation, your community, this nation and even the world. I know I am praying for a transformation from relentless violence and polarization to persistent peace and collaboration across all of human society.

And yet change is upon us whether we want it or not. We can't escape change because to live is to go through change, many changes in fact. So as much as we may wish for stability, our lives as individuals, church and world are changing.

One thing we often forget, though, is that we do have some choice in how things change and that God is constantly active in the change, working toward the new life given in Jesus Christ no matter how much we resist in our bondage to sin. We can choose how we approach change – in faith rather than fear – and we can choose to follow the lead of God's Spirit of Love rather than the hate-filled voices of anger that want to keep us fighting with one another.

In our gospel lesson from John for the second Sunday of Epiphany, Jesus says to Philip, "Follow me" and Philip says to Nathanael, "Come and See." What if during 2024, we as followers of Christ deliberately practiced these two phrases? What if we intentionally sought out ways of coming to see what God is up to in our churches and communities? What if we purposely sought out old and new ways to follow Jesus in our lives of faith and works of love?

What would you and your congregation do first and then next? And what are ways that we as the Synod equip each other in the ministry of the gospel as we "walk the way together" across Montana and Northern Wyoming?

One guide might be the "Vision, Calling and Values" Statement for the Synod which I introduced at the 2023 Synod Assembly. Here they are again:

*Montana/N. Wyoming Synod: Vision, Calling, Values*

*"...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ... (Eph 4:12)*

(Please see the video Bible study on this text on the Montana Synod website [www.montanasynd.org](http://www.montanasynd.org) )

***Vision***

*A Montana/N Wyoming Synod who is continuously building up and equipping one another for the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in people's lives, their communities, the synod, the wider church and God's world.*

## ***Calling***

*Equipping the followers of Christ of the Montana/N Wyoming Synod for ministry of:*

- 1) Building Up the Body of Christ; AND*
- 2) Living Christ's Love into the World*

## ***Values***

- 1. Proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ's Grace and Love for All*
- 2. Engaging in God's Justice for the World, especially the "least of these" (Mt 25)*
- 3. "Walking Humbly with God" in all we do and say (Micah 6:8)*
- 4. Pursuing "Unity in Harmony with Diversity" across church and community*
- 5. Promoting Relationships and Collaboration across the synod and wider church*

How can we as individuals, congregations and a synod put these into practice in various ways in our particular contexts? How can we support one another in this work of equipping through sharing our time, prayers, energy, and resources?

Over the next 12 months there will be changes coming to the synod including opportunities to participate in equipping one another for ministry. One example is the Montana Synod Assembly, held May 31-June 1, 2024 in Billings, during which we will explore together the theme "Equipping for *Doing Justice*." Other changes will include the arrival of a new Director for Evangelical Mission, some upgrades to the LPA program, and more resources for discerning as a congregation where God may be calling you to go in the future as well as what it looks like to do a Holy Closure of a congregation in a healthy, legacy-leaving way.

As we consider what God has in mind for us in 2024, I want to take this opportunity to say "Thank You!" for the ongoing generosity many of you have shown through your mission support and other gifts you have been willing and able to share. These gifts are deeply appreciated! As you are exploring your own financial realities for the coming year, I invite you to consider increasing your support as you are able in the service of the Christ's ministry across the synod.

May God bless you with the faith, hope, and love of Christ during 2024!

In Christ's Love,



Rev. Laurie Jungling  
Bishop, Montana/N. Wyoming Synod