



News of the Week February 8, 2023

Prayers of the Week

Please remember in your prayers this week:

For all who are effected by the terrible earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria.

Prayers for Pastor Trina Johnston as she recuperates at home.

From the Montana Synod Prayer Calendar:

St. James Lutheran Church, Columbus
Broadview Lutheran Church, Broadview

Western North Dakota Synod



Words from the Bishop: Church in the World

Dear Friends in Christ,

The beating death of Tyre Nichols, the shooting of Cole Stump, and other acts by badly behaving police officers who were sworn to protect and serve. The rising antisemitism and other forms of blatant hatred plaguing our communities. A county commission calling for the end of services for those people who are homeless in the hopes that they will just go away. The possible imposition of “user fees” on non-profit organizations’ property (including



churches) being discussed at the Montana State legislature. The uncivil words and behavior in political forums, on social media and in public spaces by those who would be our leaders. Unrest, uprisings and insurrections. Rampant and glorified violence and shootings. Immigration. Abortion. School curricula. Medical care for those who identify as transgender. The changing climate and its destructive consequences.

“Oh my,” you might be saying to yourself right now in possible dread or hope. “Is the bishop going to go political on us today?”

Well, in a way, yes. But not in the way you might expect. Each of the things I listed above are aspects of life that many often interpret as “political” issues. But they also are ethical, economic, sociological, biological and philosophical issues that, whether we like it or not, are messy and complex realities in the world in which we live. And as much as we may try, we as human beings and as Christians cannot escape them by hiding our heads in the sand.

The question I am asking you today is: How should we who name ourselves as “followers of Christ” and “the body of Christ” (church) engage with these worldly realities?

Throughout its existence the Christian church has asked these questions again and again, and have proposed a variety of answers.

- Some Christians have said the answer is to escape, hide, and retreat from the world and try not let these things affect us. The church tries to become a safe, comfy space apart from the world – though the world always enters the church when we arrive.
- Some Christians say the church should stand over the world, tear it down and force it to conform to one version of Christianity or another – though we often end up fighting over whose version gets to be in control.
- Some Christians say that the church should just conform to the world, losing its identity as the body of Christ and disappearing into a mild case of spiritual humanism where Jesus, the Son of God isn’t really real or necessary – though that isn’t really being Christian at all.
- Some Christians say the church should fix the world, save it from itself and transform it into a paradise that God is apparently unable or unwilling to create – though this often ends up doing as much harm as good.
- Some Christians say that the church should preach to, train, and form individual followers of Christ in their faith and then send them into the world to do justice and love as individuals. The church as an organization should not do this work together and politics or at least certain political issues should be kept out of the church community – though this has rarely worked.
- Some Christians say that the church should come together as a body, the body of Christ to learn, mature in faith and be transformed as individuals AND communities to do the work of love and justice in a world that only God can save – though these days it’s hard to agree on what to do.

The Lutheran tradition has usually lifted up the last two options – “a church in the world but not of it.” But Lutherans in the U.S. and Western Europe have tended toward the more individualistic option in recent years. “Come to church, hear the word, go out as individuals to live Christ’s way of life as you are able. But the church as community or congregation is to stay away from any action determined to be “political” that could influence and change the world for the better.

What do you think?!

At the 2019 Churchwide Assembly, a new social statement was commissioned to help the ELCA and its people explore the question of how we as followers of Christ can and should live Christ’s way of life into the public sphere of our world. A task force was created (of which I am a part) to guide us in discerning together what is and ought to be the relationship between the church and civic engagement, political activity, and society beyond the walls of the church.

In 2020, a Social Message was released that offered some more immediate guidance. [It's here](#) if you haven't read it yet.

But the Social Statement process is a longer one that calls and encourages all people in the ELCA to engage in communal moral deliberation about the topic of church, state and civic engagement. For finally, as Christ's body we must move beyond individual opinions and into a process of communal discernment that can teach and guide us on this question.

Part of this process is a study curriculum that is designed to help us engage in this moral deliberation as a whole church. And as you emerge out of this study process, you are called upon to share your perspective, questions and concerns with the social statement task force for their consideration as they then put together a social statement to be voted on at the 2025 CWA.

[That Study is now available!](#)

This study looks somewhat different from past studies, though the purpose is the same – to bring people together to listen, learn and discern as church. One neat feature of this study is that each of the six sessions has a video accompanying it and the guides are in digital, more user-friendly formats. There is a bibliography for further study for each session and questions that come from a variety of contexts across the church. There is a leader guide for those willing to lead the discussions in your congregation (that person does not have to be your pastor, though they should participate) and there is a participant guide with multiple resources.

This study is designed to teach us as well as challenges us to think, pray, and listen beyond our own opinions. It asks us to wrestle together with topics like:

- “How Is God’s Invitation to Discipleship Lived Out in a Democracy?”
- “How Do Christians Address Controversial Civic Issues?”
- “What Are Lutheran Views on Civic Life?”
- “What Are the Objectives of Democracy in the United States?”
- “What's Faith-based Living Got to Do With Civic Life?”
- “How Do We Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord in Civic Life?”

While the prospect of doing this study may raise anxiety levels of some people due to a fear of conflict or other reasons, such study is important for us both as individuals trying discern how to follow Christ into the world without becoming of the world and also as church communities as we seek to be the active, justice-seeking, loving body of Christ for the sake of the world that God calls us to serve.

This question of church and politics has been pestering us for a while and now comes before us in this study. Let us pull up our bootstraps and, trusting in the God who has already reconciled us together in Christ, let us join together to explore how the church and we who are parts of it can and should engage this messy world that God so loves.

May God bless us all in our discernment together.

Bishop Laurie

Ministry Update

We, the Board of Directors, are pleased to announce a new Lead Pastor has been hired and begins his duties this month!

Rev. Marlow Carrels comes to the ministry from Gold Hill Lutheran Church in Butte. He will be part-time for



Freedom in Christ while also serving at the Montana State Hospital at Warm Springs. A formal introduction for Pastor Marlow will appear our upcoming newsletter. We are excited to welcome him to the ministry and are looking forward to working with him.

The Board and staff, are continuing our strategic planning to carry the ministry forward well into the future. Discussions continue for possible new programs to expand the ministry. The Board is committed to continuing this much needed ministry to the people at the Montana State Prison in Deer Lodge for a long time to come

Thank you for supporting the ministry and mission of Freedom in Christ for these past 11 years. Your commitment through your financial support, as well as your prayers, has allowed us to bring the message of hope, forgiveness, and salvation to the men behind the wire at MSP, and to walk beside them in their faith journeys. We couldn't do this without you, and hope you will continue to support us as we move through this transition into the next phase for Freedom in Christ.

The future looks bright and exciting for Freedom in Christ Prison Ministry. Together we can continue to make a difference and do God's work in a place that yearns for hope and light.

Blessings –
The Board and Staff of Freedom in Christ Prison Ministry

Office Transition

Today we announce the release of Milissa (MJ) Jones from the position of office manager of the Montana Synod office. However, we are delighted to announce the arrival of our new office manager, Ms. Lori Jara, who began in this position on Monday, February 6.

You can reach her at the Synod office number or this new email address: office@montanasynod.org. We are glad to welcome Lori and the gifts and skills she brings to be a part of the Montana Synod office team.

Statement of Intent forms

"Apologies to you who have tried to fill in the Statement of Intent form. It has come to my attention that it is not formatted properly. [Here is a corrected form](#). **Please use this to indicate the Mission Support that your congregation has approved at your Annual Meeting. Please send it to me: ppleuzinger@montanasynod.org by Feb. 28th.** Thank you so much. Your indication of intentions from your congregation helps the Synod Council and leaders to gauge and adjust the budget for 2023 and 2024.

Thank you for the support from your congregation for the sake of the work we join in together as the Synod and the ELCA.

Pastor Peggy Paugh Leuzinger,
Director for Evangelical Mission
in the Montana Synod

[Click here to download the Statement of Intent form](#)

Save the date for Chico!

Dearest Colleagues,

Put it on your calendars! We are planning to have the Pastoral Leader Conference at Chico this year from April 11-14 (Tuesday - Friday).



Registration will be opened up around Ash Wednesday. To reserve a room contact Chico [directly](#) and state you want a room with the "Pastor's Conference." Be on the lookout for more information coming through the Synod News.

If you have any questions about registration feel free to contact Marlow Carrels at mcarrels@gmail.com.

Chico Planning Board

Installation Invitation

You are invited to the Service of Holy Communion and Installation on Sunday, February 12th at 2:00 PM, as the people of St. John's Lutheran Church in Helena welcome their new pastor, Rev. Keith Weatherford. Special guest preacher will be Bishop Dr. Laurie Jungling, Bishop of the Montana Synod with Rev. Brenda Frelsi, Associate to the Bishop of the Montana Synod, officiating.



All are invited to worship in person. The service will also be livestreamed via our Facebook page. Clergy who attend are invited to process. The color of the day will be green. There will be a potluck reception following the service.

[Click here to give to the Montana Synod](#)

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