



January 5, 2022

Dear Followers of Christ in the MT/NWY Synod,

God's blessings of life, love and hope be with you and your ministries as we move into 2022 together.

A few weeks ago, I listened to a psychologist share her insights about the trauma we have been experiencing the past two years due to Covid-19 and other societal stressors. "Whiplash" was the word that stuck with me as she described the continuous effects of responding to the events gripping our lives. As she spoke, I envisioned the past 22 months as riding a never-ending rollercoaster, being whipped back and forth as the journey twisted and turned, went sideways and upside down. Just when we thought things were slowing down and getting better, just when we were starting to catch our breath, then another covid variant showed up or another crisis happened and we were whiplashed back into fear mode, our bodies and brains, emotions and spirits seeking safety from what we perceived as yet another threat. There never seemed to be any opportunity to stop and recover before the next event came along.

The psychologist described how the physical, mental, and emotional effects of this continuous whiplash accumulate in us as individuals and as communities and we start to feel like we're constantly in fight, flight, or freeze mode, always on edge, ready to react, unable to look forward to the future. But at the same time, as our bodies get overloaded, we start to feel sluggish and apathetic, without energy to do anything. And we forget basic things like why we walked into a room or why I almost fed myself my cat's food by mistake. (Yes, that really happened!) Many of us just don't feel like ourselves right now.

I think the most important thing I took away from this presentation was that this reaction to the long-term whiplash trauma so many of us are experiencing is normal. If you've been feeling this way, you are experiencing what most of us are experiencing and it is natural to be experiencing it. It's not good or healthy for us or for our communities as we try to live together, but it is a normal reaction to what our society is going through right now as our brains and bodies try to protect us.

So, knowing that most people are struggling to hang in there, how do we as followers of Christ approach the new year, especially as we are making decisions for the future of our congregations and the wider church? I offer three suggestions:

1. Space and patience. We need to give ourselves and others, including our ministry leaders, the space to rest and recover. And we need to be patient with ourselves and one another as we find our ways through this. Expecting an immediate recovery from this prolonged whiplash trauma is not realistic – our bodies and minds just don't heal that fast. So whether alone or in worship, whether in council meetings or bible studies, whether in seeking discernment or holding things together, take the space and time to breathe, pray, lament, rejoice, and be in relationship with and care for one another, being kind to each other in all that you do and say.
2. Forgiveness. This prolonged whiplash trauma has put a lot of us on edge, too ready to take out our anxiety or anger on others without realizing it. Managing our emotional

reactions is important during this time. But because people are more on edge, that self-management is harder to do. So let us seek to practice forgiveness, both of ourselves and others, in the way Christ calls us to while at the same time treating one another as we want to be treated. As Jesus responded to Peter's question of how often he should forgive someone who sins against him, 'Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy times seven times.'" (Mt 18:22)

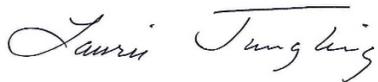
3. Faith. Faith is first and foremost trust in the God of Jesus Christ who loves us and not only wants our well-being but is actively seeking to bring that well-being to us in so many ways. Trusting in God does not mean we don't feel fear or anxiety about the uncertainty in our lives. It does not mean denying the real struggles we are going through. We're human; of course, we'll feel these things. Faith is trusting that God is indeed with us on this rollercoaster ride AND is guiding us through the twists and turns toward the new life Jesus promises, not just in the next life but even now. So, as you think about the next year, seek the faith to take a step forward into who God is calling you to be or what God is calling you to do. Maybe it will be a big step, maybe a small step. But I encourage you and your ministry to take a step forward into a new possibility that God may be leading you to explore.

In this spirit of faith and hope for gathering folks together, the synod will be stepping forward into an *in-person* Synod Assembly once again this spring. The theme is "Equipping for the Gospel" and we will be meeting at the Billings Hotel and Convention Center in Billings on June 3 & 4, 2022. We will be experimenting with a slightly different schedule that will allow some of you to return home Saturday evening; but given the size of the synod, some of you will still need to spend an extra night in Billings (at a hotel where there's a waterslide!) or on the road somewhere.

Finally, a note on the financial situation of the synod as we approach the new fiscal year. Like many of your ministries, the synod is hanging in there, finding ways to make it work as some months of mission support are better than others. Thank you for the ongoing generosity many of you have shown in your gifts to support the mission of the MT/NWY Synod as we work together to equip the followers of Christ in the ministry of the gospel! 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 hope and resilience for 2022!

In Christ's Love,



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