



January 1, 2025

Dear Siblings in Christ,

“...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things...If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:22-23, 25)

Why are you here? Most likely you’re reading this at your congregations annual meeting. And perhaps you are pondering this same question: “why am I here when I could be doing something else that’s more exciting than a boring church business meeting?”

But what if congregation annual meetings were seen as more than just a “business meeting?” What if we thought of our Annual Meetings as the exciting continuation of our year-long discernment about where God is calling our congregation to go AND, even more exciting, as taking the first and biggest step of the new year into the calling from God that we discerned together?!

Annual Meetings are the time, usually the only time of the year, when the majority of your congregation gathers to make important decisions about leadership for the congregation (president, council members), finances (the budget, compensation packages), and how the congregation hopes and plans to do its ministry over the next year and beyond.

These necessary decisions are hopefully ignited from the values and principles sparked by the Holy Spirit through spiritual discernment. They emerge from hearts and spirits made bold by the transforming love of Christ and empowered through by the Spirit’s fruit in “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” They come from a mutually discovered purpose (why are we doing this?) and vision (where is God calling us to go?) in conversation with one another and with God.

What if we entered into our Annual Meetings with the perspective of opportunity and the mindset of generosity rather than just one more church-thing to do on a Sunday afternoon in January that’s keeping us from watching the NFL playoffs? Imagine what God could accomplish in and through us for the sake of Christ’s congregation, Christ’s Church, and the wider world!

Congregations are not the only part of the church that have annual meetings. The Montana Synod, composed of congregations from across Montana and Northern Wyoming will also be having its Annual Meeting (also known as the Synod Assembly) in Great Falls, MT on May 30-31, 2025. As a Synod, we will walk on Christ’s way together to elect the synod’s leadership including a bishop, manage with generosity the blessings God has given to this Synod, and equip each other for listening to the Spirit’s guidance, proclaiming Christ’s Gospel, doing Christ’s love, and collaborating for Christ’s ministry. The theme for the 2025 Montana Synod Assembly is “Equipping for Hope.”

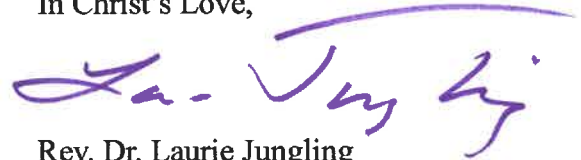
There is a third Annual Meeting that will be happening this year – the ELCA’s triannual Churchwide Assembly will meet in Phoenix, AZ on July 28-August 2, 2025. As the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, voting members will gather from diverse places across this country to discern the direction of the Holy Spirit in electing a new presiding bishop and new Churchwide

secretary, managing the blessings the ELCA has been given, deciding how we will live as Christ's Church together, and how God is calling us as the ELCA to move toward God's future together.

In all of these opportunities to gather for "Annual Meetings" in the name of Jesus Christ, let us remember that we are each and all parts of Jesus' Church, the body of Christ, and let us be emboldened to live out our faith through the hope, love and joy poured into us by the Holy Spirit.

May your congregation be blessed in this New Year by the new life that comes to us only in Jesus Christ!

In Christ's Love,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, reading "Laurie Jungling". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish above the name.

Rev. Dr. Laurie Jungling
Bishop, Montana Synod, ELCA