

JUST LOVE. JUST ACT.

JUSTICE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHWEST SYNOD OF WISCONSIN

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SHARED EXPERIENCES OF COLONIZATION:

The Global, Traumatic Impact of the Doctrine of Discovery

BY BISHOP LAURIE SKOW-ANDERSON

Mark Twain, “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of people and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime.”

If “travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, then can travel help Lutheran Christians be better neighbors to the Indigenous-Native Americans who have lived here in Wisconsin for thousands of years? That was what I was wondering when I started my five week Sabbatical this past February.

In 2021 the synod council approved my sabbatical[1] travel to Australia and New Zealand[2]. My hope was to learn about the Aboriginal People of Australia and the Maori of New Zealand. I hoped to gain some insight into their experience and compare it to the experience of the indigenous First Nation people here in the United States, especially those who live in Wisconsin.

What I am beginning to understand is that what happened to the Native Americans in the USA was more horrible than I realized and that it parallels the trauma that has been experienced around the world.

On every continent, indigenous peoples have been poorly treated by the European colonizers/settlers who claim to bring a superior way of life. In many incidences this treatment rises to the level of genocide. European explorers in Australia believed in the concept of Terra Nullius, the land was empty, owned by no one, and open to settlement. But, the lands the early explorers encountered on their journeys were far from empty.

Archaeologists believe that in Australia, aboriginal people emigrated from Southeast Asian islands to the north 50,000-60,000 years ago.

Up to 1 million aboriginals lived in Australia in the 1780s.[3]

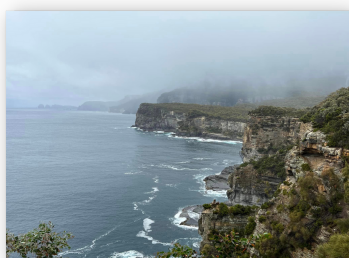
New Zealand is much younger with the first inhabitants arriving around 1300 AD from Polynesia-just 900 years ago. In 1769, there was an estimated population of 100,000 Maori.

Archaeologists agree that the first people to inhabit North America crossed over from Asia to what is now Alaska on the Bering Land Bridge 25,000 years ago. In 1492 it was estimated to have a population of up to 15 million.



History has shown that

- Europeans claimed to have discovered lands that were occupied by thousands of Indigenous/Aboriginal people. Australia-Abel Tasman (Netherlands) 1642; New Zealand-James Cook-1769 (Great Britain); North America-Christopher Columbus-1492 (Spain)
- There are 900 aboriginal groups in Australia. Many have long, proud histories, meaningful religious traditions, powerful ritual and social structure.
- Many have a unique, well developed culture of art, music, language and storytelling connected to history, religious and social structure.
- All struggled and fought wars with colonizers, a government that claimed their land for its own, and white Europeans settlers who farmed and built homes on their land.
- All were considered less than the white European colonizer.
- Some were enslaved.
- Many were decimated by disease brought by the colonizers. (In NZ the Maori went from a population of 120,000 in 1769 to only 42,000 in 1896)
- Many have struggled with alcoholism (Ask me about Alice Springs)



- NZ and US were victims of broken treaties, ceded land to the government, and lost sovereignty
 - See NZ Treaty of Waitangi 1840
 - See US Treaties affecting Wisconsin of 1832, 1837, 1854
 - Australian Aboriginals never had a treaty because Great Britain claimed rights all the land for itself.[4]
- Experienced forced removal from ancestral lands.
- Experienced the pain of missionary/state boarding schools and forced assimilation.
- Were encouraged to give up their traditional ways of life.
- Many have a lower economic standard of living than those of European white ancestry.
- All have struggled with structural and systemic racism and white supremacy

In short, native born people across the globe have been negatively affected by the Doctrine of Discovery. It certainly has in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand. I don't think it too bold to say that the much of the injustice and suffering done to indigenous/aboriginal people can be traced back to the papal statements made in the 1400s. [5]

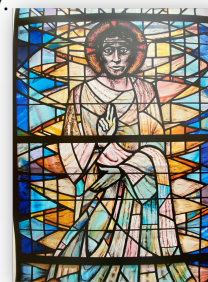


The Doctrine of Discovery was a series of statements from the Pope which authorized European powers to conquer the lands of non-Christians. In 1452, Pope Nicholas V authorized King of Portugal to conquer "Saracens, pagans and other enemies of Christ," and "reduce their persons to perpetual servitude" while also taking their land and goods "to convert them to you, and your use, and your successors the Kings of Portugal." In 1455, Pope Nicholas V issued a statement which gave Portugal authority to conquer the lands of infidels and pagans for "the salvation of all" in order to "pardon ... their souls." In 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued orders to "bring under your sway the said mainland and islands with their residents and inhabitants and to bring them to the Catholic faith." [6]

The Doctrine of Discovery is the "shameful" root of all the discrimination and marginalization indigenous peoples face today. This doctrine of domination and "conquest" ...was promoted as authority for land acquisition. It also encouraged despicable assumptions: that indigenous peoples were "savages," "barbarians," "inferior and uncivilized," among other constructs the colonizers used to subjugate, dominate, and exploit the lands, territories and resources of native peoples. [7]

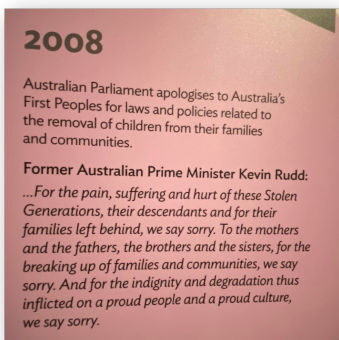
Friends, Christian people believed that the Pope (and God) wanted them to claim the land, conquer the savages and convert them to Christianity by any and all means. It was about building up wealthy powerful European kingdoms and not so much about building the kingdom of God.

As Lutheran Christians we are intentional about working for justice and right relationships with the indigenous people in Wisconsin. Recently, Pastor Sara Bishop hosted a lunch at her home with Larry Littlegeorge, from Black River Falls Ho-Chunk Nation. You might remember him from our Winter Theological Gathering, January 23, 2023. The purpose of the lunch was to consider how we can continue to be in relationship with each other and learn about our shared history and imagine ways we can work together and live together in right relationship. Larry Littlegeorge hopes we can host an educational summit this year for church leaders in our synod to learn more about the effects of the Doctrine of Discovery.



The ELCA officially repudiated the doctrine of discovery in 2016. The Northwest Synod of Wisconsin did the same in 2017. We continue to learn ways to live into that reality. This year we are bringing a resolution to the synod encouraging every congregation to write and use in worship their own land acknowledgement.

This is a simple first step. Australia and New Zealand have been doing this for years. They are far ahead of us in making amends and reparations to the indigenous and Maori people. New Zealand has committed to posting all official signs and documents in both the English and Maori language by 2026. Australia has returned large tracts of land and sacred sites to aboriginal groups in Australia. Here in the USA steps are being taken to do similar work. The state of Wisconsin has removed and changed then names of places, lakes, rivers, and streams, removing language that is disrespectful to indigenous people. As a synod we continue to work with a congregation with a name that does not honor our indigenous neighbors. We hope that they will vote to change it this year.



So I'm back from Sabbatical. It was great learning experience. I hope I can write and share more about what I learned and how it informs our work together as a synod. I do believe that *travel is indeed fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrowmindedness.*

[1] All rostered ministers are encouraged to take a sabbatical up to 3 months after seven years of ministry. See Synod Compensation Standards for Pastors.

https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cloversites.com/0a/0a854394-3a19-4d9f-b1ae-f93021508921/documents/approved_2023_standards.docx

[2] The Lilly Foundation offers grants for parish pastors to take a sabbatical. Bishops don't qualify. I paid for sabbatical myself.

[3] History of Indigenous Australians - Wikipedia

[4] The only pre-21st century attempt to negotiate a treaty with Indigenous Australians was what came to be known as Batman's Treaty. This was an agreement between John Batman, a pastoralist and businessman, and a group of Wurundjeri elders, for the purchase of land around Port Phillip, near the present site of Melbourne. The so-called treaty was declared void on 26 August 1835 by the Governor of New South Wales, Richard Bourke, which asserted that all land within the colony belonged to the Crown and that it had the sole authority to dispose of it.

An Indigenous treaty was first promised by Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1988 after receiving the Barunga Statement from Aboriginal elders, which called for such a treaty to be concluded. Despite public interest and growing support, concerns were raised over possible implications of such a treaty, such as financial compensation. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_treaties_in_Australia

[5] Discovery doctrine - Wikipedia

[6] Discovery doctrine - Wikipedia

[7] <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/newsletter/desaneeds/dialogue/2012/06/3801.html> accessed 3/19, 23

><https://healingmnstories.wordpress.com/2023/03/30/vatican-repudiates-doctrine-of-discovery/>

TRAVEL DISMANTLES PREJUDICE & CREATES EMPATHY

BY BISHOP LAURIE SKOW-ANDERSON

Mark Twain, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome charitable views of people and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."

Mark Twain makes a good case! Travel is one way we can learn to live out our baptismal promises to 'strive for justice and peace in all the earth' more fully. We confess our faith in the God of all creation, who loves the whole world, and who calls us to love our neighbor. Travel can be transformational. It can open up the world, break down walls, reveal biases and heal broken relationships. Travel could even lead to more authentic relationships and greater love of neighbors.

“
Travel is fatal to
prejudice, bigotry,
and narrow-
mindedness”

Have you been “vegetating in your little corner of the earth” just a little too long? Are you looking for a faithful, meaningful travel adventure? Are you looking for an opportunity to learn and grow in your Christian faith? Here are three synod wide opportunities that might just be the ticket.

- **Malawi**, August 4-19, 2023 A Companion Synod Visit; contact Deacon Laura Ramlow for more information. ramlow@nswi.org
- **Civil Rights Pilgrimage**-Alabama November 1-5, 2023 learn about the unsettling history of racism in our country and hope for right relationships. For more information contact Bishop Laurie at lskow-anderson@nswi.org or Pastor Joanne Sorenson at sorensonj55@gmail.com;
- **The Holy Land**-January 8-17, 2024 Visit the Holy Sites and hears stories from Lutheran Palestinian Christians <https://www.eliastrous.com/tours/northwest-synod-of-wisconsin-holy-land-trip-with-bishop-laurie-skow-anderson>

UNSETTLING TRUTHS: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery

BY REV. DIANE HOUSE

Join us for a discussion of “Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery.”

According to the publishers:

“In this prophetic blend of history, theology, and cultural commentary, Mark Chals and Soong-Chan Rah reveal the far-reaching, damaging effects of the “Doctrine of Discovery.” In the fifteenth century, official church edicts gave Christian explorers the right to claim territories the “discovered.” This was institutionalized as an implicit national framework that justifies American triumphalism, white supremacy, and ongoing injustices. The result is that the dominant culture idealizes a history of discovery, opportunity, expansion, and equality, while minority communities have been traumatized by colonization, slavery, segregation, and dehumanization.

Healing begins when deeply entrenched beliefs are unsettled. As other nations have instituted truth and reconciliation commissions, so do the authors call our nation and churches to a truth-telling that will expose past injustices and open the door to conciliation and true community.”

There are nine copies of the book signed by author Mark Charles available through the synod office. Contact Liz Bartsch if you would like one. The book is also readily available on Mark Charles' website or on Amazon.

The first book discussion will be Tuesday, April 11th by Zoom at 7 p.m.

On April 17th there will be a forty five minute question and answer with author Mark Charles by Zoom beginning at 7 p.m.

So, purchase your copy of the book and begin reading! Let Liz Bartsch know that you plan to attend the studies and she will email you a Zoom link before each study.

SERMON

Mark 4:1-11

BY REV. SARAH S.V. BISHOP

Lent is a time when we are called to examine our commitment to faithful living. Matthew 4:1-11 is one of many signals in Matthew that the intense end-time suffering is happening, a sort of Lent for the church about to be born, and so, this is a good place to start! Jesus and the devil come face-to-face. This isn't just about the man named Jesus and his personal choices. This is looking to the future of the church that he will establish. He is deciding: will the church choose the way of the Realm or the way of the devil. The church should take its model from Jesus and, in the power of the Spirit, live faithfully. (whew) Matthew uses the three temptations as models of points in which the church is tempted to turn away from the movement towards the Realm of God and to continue to live in the selfish, violent, self-destructive ways of the old age.

Three lies and the truth.... There are three lies offered up in this Gospel. The first lie is the temptation to prioritize the gifts of God over God himself. Jesus has an advantage, unseen, that others do not have, and he can benefit from it without doing ANYthing. That's tempting, but he cited Deuteronomy and does not succumb. The second lie is that Jesus could, if he chose, interpret the Word of God through his own circumstances rather than the Gospel. If Jesus forgets that we are chosen, not that we do the choosing, he could step off that cliff, but he knows it is a lie.

A tempting lie, but a lie nonetheless. The third lie is that to believe that it is okay to pursue a good thing in the wrong way. It's not. Jesus knows that is the worship of power, refusing to live in love, and respect, and dignity, and wielding power for its own sake, and that is not Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. Jesus recognizes this lie too. They all 'make sense', in a certain way, but they are all utterly selfish, if interpreted that way.

Besides the biography of Jesus, the opportunity for Matthew to show us a role model, Matthew narrates the story of the temptation as a paradigm for the church.

People are tempted to relieve their uncertainty and suffering by turning away from the values and practices of the Realm of God, and turning to the devil, settling for the present broken state of the world, the kingdom of sin and death. And we ARE challenged, because it is the path of least resistance, moderation, minimal effort. But the truth is living out the grace of God, being the church, the Kingdom of heaven on earth. THAT is what we are called to be.

There is no fixing the past. You will notice, of all the lies that the Devil offered up, UNDOING the past was not one of them. There is however, the path that Jesus chose, making the future brighter. He steps out of the wilderness and onto the path to the Cross. Jesus doesn't do that for himself, he does that for others. He leaves his ego in the Jordan at his baptism, and that is so scary that he needs to be plunked into the wilderness to process it. He comes out renewed in the truth, and starts creating the church. I'm going to go out on a limb and say that WE are the church of CHRIST, not of power or glory or tradition. We are called to live in right relationship with ourselves, our God and our neighbors.

And we can't do that if we refuse to look at injustices, whether or not we commit them, observe them, or live in a country that has a history of them.

Spoiler, ALL the countries have a history of injustice, not one is immune from this temptation. I've lived in the former Soviet Union, it's there. I've lived in Europe, still there. I've lived in Australia, still there too, even if they are in the midst of a very public, very painful, peace and reconciliation process, it is still there. No one wants to talk about this, but racism is bad for everyone; it's bad for those that suffer under it, it's bad for those who practice it, it's bad for the community in which it exists. Racism hurts everyone, it's just that some it hurts more visibly than others. It crushes imagination, it closes doors, it leaves people in the wilderness, it lowers return on investment, it reduces the ability to adapt.

This Gospel shows us, very vividly, that we can FIX injustice by trusting God having chosen us. We can HELP people. We can be a place where dignity, respect and dare I say it, LOVE prevail.

And that is a really tall order in a world that is all about division and sides, us and them, right and right now, but it is the truth.

There IS joy in this message. Sounds ridiculous, but the joy is that the work is never done. We will always be righting wrongs. We will always be learning better ways. We will always keep trying. No, I'm not crazy; fighting for right relationship IS work, but it is joyful work! Because there is joy in being those who are respected and offer respect, there is joy in being those who have quiet dignity and offer the same to others, and there is joy in being those who embody loving kindness in their very being. "There are not really three temptations, but three variations on the same basic lie. The devil has a one-track mind. As from the beginning, he tempts his victims to go for power ("you will be like God" [Gen. 3:5]). Evidently he knows there is no surer path to internal contradiction and self-destruction.[1]"

Addendum: You as a congregation, like it or not, have been plunked into a wilderness of unknowing and temptation, a wilderness that you did not choose. Your temptations are the same as Jesus': the temptation to prioritize the past instead of the future, the temptation to try to justify the circumstances instead of living out the Gospel, the temptation to pursue a good thing in the wrong way and hold onto brokenness. But the Gospel, Jesus, and the Commandments all teach us, and we know the truth.

We walk out of the wilderness with the joy of Jesus, stepping onto the path that leads to our salvation, and the opportunity that the values and practices of the Realm of God hold out for others.

And we do so, in the name of the Creator, Creating and Created God.

Amen.

[1] Bartlett, David L.; Barbara Brown Bartlett. Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide (Feasting on the Word: Year A volume). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

JONAH SUPPORTS NEW CHAPTER FOR WELCOMING NEW NEIGHBORS

BY BEA EVANS

A spark of an idea ignited into a grassroots movement named Welcoming New Neighbors (WNN) a year ago. In early February 2022, Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan approved Eau Claire as a remote resettlement location. A week later, eight individuals who had fled Afghanistan arrived in Eau Claire to begin a new life.

Fortunately, there was room at an inn because apartments were not available. Orientation sessions, registration for English classes, shopping trips to Walmart, learning how to ride the bus, medical and benefit appointments filled many days. Apartment hunting continued. Stock the pantry efforts picked up steam. Household goods and furniture requests were posted to Sign-up Genius and donations were received. Apartments were secured, leases signed, and move-ins took place. Each step of the way dedicated volunteers stepped in to help.

Work permits were received, jobs were found, and our new neighbors started working. Accommodations and adjustments were made to meet individual needs. Our new neighbors passed driver's tests, received their licenses, and purchased cars. Independence grew.

A few weeks ago, a group of neighbors gathered to celebrate one year of welcome. Some in the group were Welcoming New Neighbors volunteers. Others were neighbors, originally from Afghanistan, who now call Eau Claire home.

Speaking around a lit candle, volunteers shared an incident or two from the past year that exemplified the personal joy and reward gained through interaction, problem solving, coaching, and service to our new neighbors. Many who spoke were near tears.

"The guys," our new neighbors, then chose to express their deep appreciation for everything their local family (Welcoming New Neighbor volunteers) provided this past year. When expressing his gratitude, one gentleman mentioned that he felt he was "returning home to Eau Claire" following his asylum interview in Chicago. Those who followed him echoed his remarks and added they are now one year nearer to having their families joining them.

Welcoming New Neighbors looks forward to that time, as well. In the meantime, new neighbors continue to arrive in northwest Wisconsin from Ukraine, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and other countries. The mission of WNN is to build an organization that serves as a resource to and support of immigrants and those working with immigrants in the greater northwest Wisconsin area as well as one that educates and builds awareness throughout the wider community.

Recently, Welcoming New Neighbors requested fiscal sponsorship from JONAH for a term of 3-5 years. JONAH is a Wisconsin nonprofit based in Eau Claire, WI. It exists to deepen relationships within and among faith communities and partner organizations to empower people in addressing the root causes of social injustice in the greater community. It does so by working to increase the capacity for grassroots leadership to bring about systemic change.



The JONAH Board approved the request for fiscal sponsorship of WNN on January 17, 2023. This will allow WNN to discern how to broaden its immigrant welcoming mission without spending considerable upfront time pursuing its own 501c3 incorporation. The two organizations signed a Memorandum of Understanding on March 1st.

Welcoming New Neighbors is grateful to JONAH for its support and looks forward to accompanying neighbors new to our country as they begin their lives in northwest Wisconsin. We also wish to welcome Rev. Diane House, the ELCA NW Synod Director for Evangelical Mission, to the Welcoming New Neighbors Steering Committee.

If you are interested in getting involved or receiving further information, please contact Bea Evans (beaevans2@gmail.com or 262 565-3327.)

ECOFAITH SUMMIT

BY REV. GREG KAUFMANN

Your Synod Care of Creation Team encourages you to participate in this EcoFaith Summit, April 15. You will get to hear and learn from youth, veteran practitioners, Native Americans, and other ELCA partners about how to become part of the solution rather than part of the problem!



In a moment of deep ecological crisis, this year's EcoFaith Summit calls us to become part of the Holy Spirit's subversive plot to pollinate an alternative way of being human for the sake of life. In this plot, we find our model and hope from pollinator species. These tiny, apparently powerless, often overlooked and disregarded creatures, whose drastic decline endangers so much we depend upon, are a key to the regeneration of life itself. Through worship, a keynote presentation, diverse storytellers, conversations, and engagement sessions, together we will be empowered to be participants in this unfolding plot.

Participants have the option of attending in person (\$25 which covers meals and reception) or virtually (Free). If you plan on driving to Duluth, please note that you can request free housing with some of our Superior area congregations! Just complete the google doc, which is linked right on the Eventbrite registration form.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ecofaith-summit-2023-registration-544635909667>

Shape of the Day:

- 9:30a.m. Registration and coffee and refreshments/ visit table exhibits
- 10:a.m. Opening
- 10:15a.m. Keynote presentation: Margot Monson, entomologist and beekeeper
- 11:10a.m. Five Pollinating storytellers (7 minutes each)
- 12pm Lunch and time to visit table exhibits
- Afternoon: Engagement sessions: Plotting for Life in a Time of Ecological Crisis
- 1:00-1:45p.m. Engagement session 1- (1 online, 2 in-person options)
- 2:00-2:45p.m. Engagement session 2- (1 online, 2 in-person options)
- 3:00p.m. Sending worship
- 3:30p.m. Reception and networking/ visit table exhibits

CURRENT REVOLUTION

Free Streaming License!

SHARED BY INTERFAITH POWER AND LIGHT

Registration now available for the free streaming license! Share the featured film of IPL's Faith Climate Action Week 2023 - Current Revolution - with your congregation.

Share the exciting news of the transition to clean energy with your congregation with a series of short films called Current Revolution, this year's featured film of Faith Climate Action Week in April. These films show the possibility of a just transition to a clean energy economy where the well-being of workers and frontline community members is valued, instead of neglected.

The short films are a perfect length to view in a group and then allow time for discussion at your events, and you can offer the whole series over multiple weeks or evenings! The first two of the three films are approximately 30 minutes each, and the last is 6 minutes.

IPL congregations may register to share these films for free during Faith Climate Action Week, April 14-23, 2023. A screening license is normally \$90, but thanks to the generosity of the American Resilience Project, this screening license is FREE to IPL congregations.

DVDs are available for purchase through IPL for screening at any time. \$25 plus shipping, INCLUDES screening rights (valued at \$90.)



These films illustrate this year's Faith Climate Action Week theme: Living the Golden Rule: Just Transition to a Clean Energy Economy. The theme examines our responsibility to transition to energy sources that are sustainable and healthy for our communities and Creation.

The film streaming option has Spanish subtitles, and IPL provides a Spanish-language screening kit. Please forward this bi-lingual email below to your Spanish-speaking friends and congregations in your area.

IPL invites you to screen this film series as part of your celebrations of Earth Month and join the community of people of faith preaching, teaching, and acting to heal the climate in 2023!

~ Sarah Paulos, Program Director - IPL

All information regarding streaming and licensing can be found here:

<https://interfaithpowerandlight.org/faithclimateactionweek/2023-featured-film-current-revolution-series/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=e1c9af60-ab8e-4c5a-a8a2-dc47be7438d1>

YOUTH ADVOCACY RETREAT

REGISTRATION EXTENDED UNTIL APRIL 3!



The Lutheran Office of Public Policy (LOPPW), the Northern Great Lakes Synod, and the five ELCA Synods in Wisconsin invite high school youth and adult leaders who are interested in social justice to a Youth Advocacy Retreat April 14-16, 2023 in Madison, WI. As the body of Christ, we support all children of God in the promises made on their behalf in baptism and echoed by their voices as they affirm those promises for themselves. LOPPW amplifies our call to work for justice and peace in all the earth.

Leaders involved in organizing this Advocacy Retreat have noticed that many youth share a common interest in social justice and are eager to learn more about advocacy and how it relates to our Lutheran faith. Our goal is to help youth find their voice and make connections between their faith and social concerns, develop concrete ways to use their voice for positive change, and build relationships with other youth who are interested in advocacy.

Participants will explore topics that affect us both globally and locally such as racism, environmental justice, LGBTQIA+ advocacy, and world hunger. There will be designated time for meaningful conversations, engaging worship experiences, prayer, interactive music, personal reflection, and fellowship with peers.

Please help us spread the word and encourage young people you know to participate in this faith-forming event. Thanks to grant funding and generous sponsorships, registration for the entire weekend, including lodging and meals is only \$75 per person. Please register by April 3 at: loppw.org/resources/youth-advocacy.

GREEN BLADES RISING ROUNDTABLE

Matthew 5:1-12

BY LUKE PEDERSON, S.A.M.

Although we are in the midst of the winter season, our text from Matthew, the Beatitudes, brings to mind for me Easter Sunday, and the special sunrise service the parish I serve holds every year on top of a hill. Following a narrow and twisting road takes you to the hilltop and a natural amphitheater formed from the construction of the road, trees all around and a white wooden cross overlooking the clearing. Modes of transportation vary for the sunrise worship—from cars and trucks to tractors and horses—as the early risers gather in the growing light of Easter morning in God's good creation to proclaim Christ risen and share in the Lord's Supper. Depending on when Easter falls on the calendar, it can either be wintery with snow on the ground, or pleasant and mild with the first signs of green grass and buds on the trees. Wild Turkeys may be heard gobbling and Ruffed Grouse drumming, ushering in the new day along with the songbirds, the land waking up after a winter's rest. Whatever the weather, we gather in the first light of a new day to worship on the hilltop surrounded by the beauty of the natural world.

This special hilltop is located in the special and unique Driftless Region. Comprising southwestern Wisconsin and portions of southeastern Minnesota, northeast Iowa, and northwest Illinois, this region is named for the lack of glacial drift, indicating that this region was missed by the glaciers that once covered most of the Upper Midwest. This distinctive landscape is known for its steep hills, ridges, bluffs, and spring-fed streams that are home to native Brook Trout. It is also home to some rare and unique ecosystems—like the “goat prairies” on the bluffs near the Mississippi River—and relic populations of plants and animals more commonly found north or south of this region.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaims a message of transformation, a message that turns our notions of being successful and blessed upside down.

From the mountaintop, Jesus brings us the vision of the Kingdom of God that has come to Earth, the kingdom that continues to be revealed to us. Jesus speaks to a crowd that has lived under the rule of the Roman Empire—an empire of conquest colonization, and expansion, an empire that subjugates and enslaves, that keeps the peace by the point of the sword. An empire that saw the world as something to be conquered, controlled, and shaped to serve human needs and desires.



In its expansion, Rome left in its wake lands damaged and degraded through deforestation, overgrazing, and intensive agriculture. Are we still stuck on that same road today? Topsoil continues to wash off the fields, reducing fertility and damaging streams, rivers, and lakes. Aquifers are depleting faster than they can recharge, wildlife habitats continue to diminish, and the ever-growing demands for fossil fuels degrade land in extracting them and alter the global climate as they are consumed. In his book “A Sand County Almanac”, Aldo Leopold wrote, We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see the land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. [1] Could a radical reversal for us in the 21st century be to see the land, the Earth, not in monetary value, in productive vs. unproductive, but in the value as the beloved creation of God to which we belong? A precious world, a precious gift, in which we have been commissioned as caretakers. May we see the Kingdom of God in the uniqueness of the landscapes on which we live; may we approach the land in humility and respect, not as conquerors but as co-creators with God.

May prophetic voices continue to ring out, calling on us to be healers bringing about restoration and reconciliation in God's good Earth.

- <http://theecoexperts.co.uk/blog/roman-empire-impact>.
- <http://sustainabledriftless.org>

[1] A Sand County Almanac, Aldo Leopold, 1948.

RACISM MAKES PEOPLE BAD AT THEIR JOBS

BY REV. GARY HEDDING.

Joseph and I and about ten other junior high and high school young people from our congregation were playing hide and seek in a Walmart at 2:00 in the morning (it was a lock-in – it's what we do). I was with Joseph because his mom had stayed off of drugs while pregnant with him, but couldn't go through the pregnancy without alcohol. Joseph was a fetal alcohol syndrome baby and had massive challenges with impulse control. He needed adult supervision in this kind of situation. Joseph was also mixed race and presented predominantly as Black. Still, I was surprised when a young man kept following us around the store.



When my son was in high school he worked at a big box store, mostly unloading trucks and stocking shelves. He was also trained as, what these stores call, a “loss prevention specialist”. He would go “under cover” to catch shop lifters. As part of his training, he was educated as to who was most likely to shoplift. Far and away on the list of likely shoplifters were young teen and tween girls. They would take small, easily concealed items like jewelry, small cosmetic items, and CD's (ok this was a few years ago).

Despite his training, this young man was following the Black kid who had a white adult at his side. He and I had a conversation. He did not deny nor confirm that he was a loss prevention specialist, but did get a little nervous. He got more nervous when I mentioned my son's training at this job and the fact that I had half a dozen young women roaming the store without adult supervision, who better fit the profile of who might be robbing the store.

He went to check on them. This is an example of how racism makes people bad at their jobs. This man saw a young black man and, despite his training, identified Joseph as the most likely shoplifter in the store.

This is not unusual. Studies confirm that some medical workers often prescribe less medications for pain to people of color, especially women of color. Based on race, they unconsciously assume that people of color can take pain better and that their complaints of pain might be exaggerated to acquire pain killers, that they don't really need, for recreational use or to sell. Defense lawyers are more likely to encourage people of color to take a plea deal rather than mount a vigorous defense. Prosecutors are more likely to reject a plea deal for people of color in favor of a vigorous prosecution. Taxi drivers are more likely to pass by people of color even though it is their job to pick people up. Airbnb changed their reservation material to exclude profile pictures because people of color were being rejected based on race, even though the job of Airbnb of the hosts is to make money welcoming guests into their homes and that most of the problems the owners have are with college aged white people. Some teachers have been found to use more punitive and less trauma sensitive punishments on students of color, even when trained well. Bouncers in bars are more likely to react sooner and with more force with patrons of color. There is documented evidence that some police officers, including officers of color, will do the same for suspects, some of whom end up dead.

Some of this is intentional, but the majority is unconscious bias and systemic racism. Most people don't intend to be bad at their jobs, but emotional and cultural templates that we all carry override training and professional standards. The loss prevention specialist at Walmart that early, early morning would not identify with any racist organization and could have had Black friends, yet he ignored his training and went with his gut. His gut had an unconscious bias that made him bad at his job.

A MILESTONE FOR WOMEN LEADERS IN THE HOLY LAND

ELCA GLOBAL LINKS.

International Women's Day, March 8, gave us an opportunity to honor past, present and future women leaders throughout our global community. One of those leaders is the Rev. Sally Azar, who recently became the Holy Land's first female pastor. The Rev. Azar pursued her Master of Arts degree at Near East School of Theology with the support of an ELCA International Leaders Program scholarship. On Jan. 22 she became the first woman ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL).



The Rev. Azar's siblings in Christ journeyed from around the world to celebrate this joyous event with the ELCJHL. ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton attended the ordination service, along with the Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) participants serving in Jordan and the West Bank.

"Over 100 clergy, including my mom, attended from all over the world and across denominations," said Harper Bolz-Weber, a YAGM volunteer. "In total, more than 500 people attended the service at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Jerusalem. ... I felt honored to have been able to attend and participate in such a historic event, and I'm sure I will never forget it." YAGM volunteer Sophie Caesar also knew she was taking part in something special: "I could feel the holy spirit moving while assisting in such a monumental service."

More information here:
<https://www.livinglutheran.org/2023/01/bishop-eaton-releases-statement-on-ordination-of-first-female-palestinian-pastor/>

CIVIC LIFE & FAITH

A Study Curriculum

ELCA TASK FORCE FOR STUDIES ON CIVIC LIFE AND FAITH.

How are we as Lutheran Christians called to civic engagement, including in the arenas of government and political life? What is the proper relationship of the church with government, and what is not? What does religious liberty actually include? What are our scriptural and confessional resources for probing such questions about civic life?

We invite you and your congregation to explore these questions and more by using "A Study Curriculum on Civic Life and Faith."

This study curriculum has been released by the ELCA Task Force for Studies on Civic Life and Faith. It includes six sessions and is a critical step on the way to the social statement called for by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly.

Each session comes ready to use, with prayers, hymn suggestions, Scriptures, a teaching video, group discussion questions, suggested resources, and case studies taken from everyday life. There is a response form after each session for participants to communicate with the task force itself on the material covered.

The sessions are:

- Session 1: How Is God's Invitation to Discipleship Lived Out in a Democracy?
- Session 2: How Do Christians Address Controversial Civic Issues?
- Session 3: What Are Lutheran Views on Civic Life?
- Session 4: What Are the Objectives of Democracy in the United States?
- Session 5: What's Faith-based Living Got to Do With Civic Life?
- Session 6: How Do We Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord in Civic Life?

Participants' feedback is key in helping the task force think as they move into the next phase of drafting a social statement on these important issues. The study response period is open until Oct. 15.

To download the study and learn more about the task force's work, go to elca.org/civicsandfaith. If you have questions, please reach out to civicsandfaith@elca.org.

SYNOD CALENDAR OF EVENTS

BOOK STUDY

Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery, by Mark Charles

April 11, 2023 (Discussion)

April 17, 2023 (Q&A w/Author)

Via Zoom

- <https://nswi.org>

YOUTH ADVOCACY RETREAT

Host: LOPPW + 6 Synods

April 14-16, 2023

Madison, WI

- <https://www.loppw.org/resources/youth-advocacy/>

ECOFAITH SUMMIT

Host: Northeast MN Synod

April 15, 2023

- <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ecofaith-summit-2023-registration-544635909667>

PRE-ASSEMBLY FORUMS

April 23, 24, & 25, 2023

Via Zoom

- nswi.org

SYNOD ASSEMBLY

Rebound: From Worry to Wonder

April 29, 2023

Bethany Lutheran - Rice Lake

- <https://nswi.org/synod-assembly-2023>

ELCA Rostered Leaders Gathering

Rekindle the Gift Within You

July 17-20, 2023

Phoenix, Arizona

JOURNEY: Tri-synod High School

Youth Gathering

July 24-27, 2023

UW River Falls

Details can be found here:

<https://nswi.org/journey>

SYNOD TRIP TO MALAWI

August 4-18, 2023

FALL MINISTRY RETREAT

September 24-26, 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/north-west-synod-of-wisconsin-holy-land-trip-with-bishop-laurie-skow-anderson>

ELCA YOUTH MINISTRY

EXTRAVAGANZA

January 18-21, 2024

New Orleans, LA

- <https://www.elcaymnet.org/ext24>

ELCA YOUTH GATHERING

July 16-20, 2024

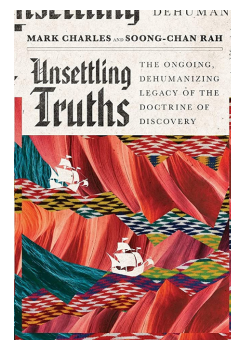
New Orleans, LA

- <https://www.elca.org/YouthGathering>

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

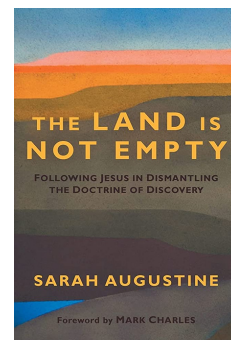
Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery

By Mark Charles & Soong-Chan Rah (2019)



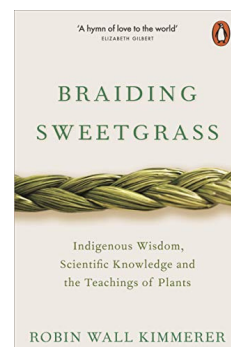
The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling The Doctrine of Discovery

By Sarah Augustine, Foreword by Mark Charles. (2021)



Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants

By Robin Wall Kimmerer (2015)



Northwest Synod of Wisconsin
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

SOCIAL JUSTICE TRAINING OPTIONS

Lead by Rev. Sara Villarreal – Bishop
 Synod Advocate for Right Relationships
synodadvocate@nswsi.org

