



Bishop's Report to the 2026 WND Synod Assembly

*“Welcome one another, therefore,
just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”
(Romans 15:7)*

WND Synod Assembly Voting Members,

Grace and peace to you from God our Creator and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The word *welcome* has shaped my faith, my understanding of the church, and my ministry among you. It is a word that speaks not only of hospitality, but of belonging. Not only of invitation, but of grace. It is a word that tells the truth about who we are because of Jesus: a people who have first been welcomed and therefore a people who are sent to welcome.



*Prayer before worship at Cristo Rey
Lutheran Church in Santa Ana, El Salvador.*

As I reflect on these past six years of our shared ministry, I do so with deep gratitude. Across this synod, I have witnessed holy moments that give life to the variety of ways that we welcome one another as people of faith who call this sacred North Dakota place our home.

Holy moments in congregations—large and small—that show up for their neighbors with quiet faithfulness. Holy moments in leaders—rostered and lay—who proclaim the gospel with courage and care. Holy moments as communities accompany one another through loss, change, and new beginnings.

Again and again, I have seen the gospel not only proclaimed, but embodied.

You have also extended that same welcome to me and to my family. You have welcomed us into your congregations, your communities, and your lives. For that gift, I give thanks to God.

As many of you know, this assembly marks a time of transition. After prayerful discernment, I have accepted a call to serve the wider church as Executive for Christian Community and Leadership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Because of this new call, I will not be standing for re-election as bishop. My service as your bishop will conclude on July 31, 2026.

Transitions can bring uncertainty, and they can also open space for renewal.



*One of my favorite stops
across the street from
Lebanon Lutheran Church,
Amidon, ND.*

Our assembly theme this year, *Walking Together*, drawn from Luke 10, offers a faithful lens for this moment. Jesus sends the seventy out in pairs into places they have not yet been. They are sent without certainty, yet not without purpose. They go trusting that God is already at work ahead of them.

I believe this is where we find ourselves as a synod.
We are a people still being sent.
A people still walking together.
A people trusting that the Spirit is already moving into what comes next.



ELCA Bishops elected in 2020.

This season invites us into prayerful discernment—prayer for the one who will be called to serve as our next bishop, prayer for voting members, and prayer for the Spirit to guide and sustain this synod in the days ahead.

Even as leadership changes, our shared mission remains clear. We are called “to encourage and equip the ministries of the Western North Dakota Synod, so that the good news of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, and all God’s children feel welcomed and included in the ministries to which God calls us.” (WND Synod’s Why Statement)



Conversation and coffee at The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Beit Sahour, West Bank, Palestine, a Palestinian Christian Lutheran church.

As I prepare to step into a new role in the wider church, I do so with confidence and hope. Though my call is changing, we remain bound together in Christ and in our shared participation in God’s mission.

I trust that the Spirit who has guided us thus far will continue to lead you. I trust that Christ is already at work among you. And I trust that the welcome you have lived so faithfully will continue to glorify God in ways yet unseen.

Thank you for your faith, your partnership in the gospel, and the gift of serving as your bishop. It has been one of the greatest honors of my life.

In Christ’s peace,

The Rev. Craig A. Schweitzer
Bishop, Western North Dakota Synod



Three ordinations in one at Faith Lutheran in Bismarck, ND.



Enjoying a ride with “Edith” at Camp of the Cross Ministries.