

Report to the 2016 Metro D.C. Synod Assembly
Assistant to the Bishop, The Rev. Amy Thompson Sevimli

To Everything There is a Season... Ecclesiastes 3.1

These words from the figure we call Solomon could as easily be a 21st century colloquialism as biblical wisdom. And perhaps that is why they continue to ring true. They certainly do for me these days. Because an important season in my life is coming to an end, and a new one will soon begin. In just a few weeks my family and I will move to Tbilisi, Georgia, where we will begin a new season of our lives.

Preparing for the Synod Assembly has given me an opportunity to reflect on this season for me in the synod, which has lasted over eight years. It has been a good season. In the past days, it's been especially entertaining to read back through my past Synod Assembly reports, to remember the hopes, dreams, projects and concerns that occupied my heart and my time over these years. I was reminded of all the work I did on Project Connect, the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), Bethany Lutheran Church, The Journey, the Synod Youth Protection Policy, helping launch River of Grace, Huddles, and all the administrative work I have moved into these last few years with congregations in transition, candidacy, personnel, compensation guidelines, background checks and chief of staff responsibilities. All of these things have been enriching, and they have taught me so much (sometimes more than I wanted to know) about the church.

And while I enjoyed all the work I did, especially that with congregations and rostered leaders, the work I did that changed me the most was the work with young adults. Though it has no longer been a priority in my work these last couple of years, it was some of the most meaningful and life-changing work I have ever done. And the part about it that was most meaningful and changing came not through the activities I set up or the work I did with congregations, but it came through the listening I did with the young adults themselves. One of the articles I wrote about this listening can be found here:

<https://www.faithandleadership.com/amy-thompson-sevimli-radical-proposal-ask-people-why-they-don%E2%80%99t-come-church>


When I listened to these young adults in the D.C. area who were disconnected from church, I met people who were hoping, hurting, looking for community and longing for God. I learned, much to my own lifetime-Lutheran, church-going surprise, that when these young people entered our congregations, they rarely felt as if they encountered God at all. And that made me sad. Deeply sad. It was the kind of sadness that caused me to stop, think about what they were saying, and find myself so convicted by their words that I could do nothing else but change.

That change has resulted not in just in how I see young adults, but the way I see all people who are disconnected from the Church and faith. And it has changed the way I see the Church, the future of the Church, and God active in it. And I'll tell you I don't know if I would say if I am more relieved or excited about the Church after the change. I am relieved because I trust and know that God's Church is going to be fine—much different, but fine. I am excited because it's going to be different, and I have no idea what that will mean or look like, but it seems like the sky is the limit. The Church is still reforming, and we have a chance to be part of that. That's our call and opportunity.

I would name one request and one hope I have in the midst of this opportunity.

First, my request: if a young adult (or any person disconnected from church) wants to talk to you about your faith, please take the time to listen. Listen to their questions, hope, dreams and frustrations. And when that person criticizes your faith or your church, listen again! Don't retort or retaliate against the misconceptions or false perceptions they may hold, but just listen to them first. Then pray for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and use grace-filled words carefully.

Second, in the midst of our conversations about racial equality, my hope is that young adults will lead the way on this... and that we will allow them. My sense is that young adults have a different perspective on racial equality than other generations because more than any other generation they have grown up with a healthier sense of racial equity. It's not perfect, but it holds so much promise. They are friends with one another, marry one another, go to school together, are more diverse as a general population, and are not afraid to talk about the realities of who they are. To be clear, they are not perfect (but then who is?), and they will not always get it right, but they carry real capacity deep within them (more than they know sometimes), and I hope we will allow them to speak up AND lead on issues of great importance like this.



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Thanksgiving and Gratitude

As I close I want to give thanks for all the people I have had the honor of working with. Many of you have heard me say: Papers are People. And I really believe that. When I am working with your congregation, your mobility papers, your Ministry Site Profile or your candidacy paperwork, your documents are not just papers to push (though there are plenty of those); they are papers that represent real people to me. So, it has been an honor to push your papers around and to get to know you through personal interactions that have given me windows into your hearts and souls.

In closing I want to thank the people I work with. First, I give my heartfelt thanks to the outgoing candidacy chairperson, Ms. Susan Feldhausen. She took on a job more involved than she expected, and not only has she done excellent work but she has been amazing to work with.

I also want to acknowledge and thank Bishop Graham, Pastor Phil Hirsch, Katharyn Wheeler, Karen Krueger, Maddie Tallman, Pastor Tom Knoll and Florence Heacock. I want specially to thank the Bishop, who was brave enough to bring me in to the synod not long after he started. When my name was announced to the synod, I know that A LOT of people were scratching their heads, wondering who I was and whether I could do this. I have often wondered if the Bishop has found himself scratching his head over the years as he got to know what he had really gotten himself into with me in the office. In any case, working with him has been a grace-filled adventure. He is a man of greater faith than you may know, and one of the kindest and wisest people I know.

So much of this could be said for your whole staff. When I wrote my letter to the Synod announcing my departure earlier this week, I said that this synod is blessed with some of the most faithful, funny, Christ loving and peace and justice seeking people one could know, and I really mean that. You are blessed with an incredible synod staff. All of these people are enormously faithful and work in the midst of great challenges. It is an honor, a privilege and a joy to call them colleagues and friends, and I will miss them greatly.

Thank you for your partnership and the opportunity to walk together with you in faith.

God's blessings and Godspeed.

The Rev. Amy Thompson Sevimli

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