

Dwelling in the Word

A Practice for Congregations in the Central/Southern Illinois Synod for 2020-2021

At the 2019 Synod Assembly of the Central/Southern Illinois Synod, participants shared ideas and concerns about life together in our synod based on Bishop Roth's sabbatical report to the C/SIS. Based on those conversations, the Synod Council is strongly encouraging congregations to join Synod Council and synod committees in a spiritually nourishing practice called "Dwelling in the Word." Beginning in June 2020, all synod meetings will include a time of Dwelling in the Word. Congregations are also urged to engage in Dwelling in the Word at their council meetings, committee meetings, Bible studies, and/or any other gatherings. At Synod Assembly in 2021, we will share stories about how we have seen the practice of Dwelling in the Word forming and transforming individuals, congregations, and the C/SIS. We will share how we heard God calling, inviting, and moving among us and how that impacts our life together as a synod.

What is Dwelling in the Word?

Dwelling in the Word is a 20-30-minute process for becoming aware of God's presence and the Spirit's movement by listening and reflecting on Scripture as a gathered community. Dwelling in the Word forms faith and trust within a group by sharing responses to three questions:

- What captures my attention?
- What questions do I have? What do I wonder?
- Where might God's Spirit be nudging us?

The word "dwell" or "abide" is used frequently in Scripture. It means to live or remain somewhere or with someone for a time. The practice of Dwelling in the Word invites communities to live with a text for a time so that the reflections, wonderings, and promptings of God's Word form and shape our faith and living. The purpose of Dwelling in the Word is not about answering questions or getting to particular results, but rather allowing ourselves to be present with God's living Word. (Thus, Dwelling in the Word does not require a leader steeped in biblical scholarship.)

If your congregation would like to participate, here are the seasons and texts in which we will dwell together.

June – August 2020
Philippians 4:2-9

September – November 28, 2020
2 Corinthians 9:10-15

November 29, 2020 (Advent) – February 16, 2021
John 1:35-46

February 17, 2021 (Ash Wednesday) – April 3, 2021 (Holy Saturday)
Luke 10:1-12

April 4, 2021 (Easter) – June 5, 2021 (Synod Assembly)
Acts 16:6-15

How to Lead Dwelling in the Word

Preparing for the Gathering

- This practice is meant to be flexible, for use with smaller or larger groups; you are free to adapt the amount of time for sharing, as well as whether to spend time with partners or small groups or only sharing with the whole group. Dwelling in the Word can be done in person or through video conference. The “Acting” section would be more applicable to council and committee meetings than a Bible study or quilting group.
- Depending on your group, you may want to provide a handout or screen share with the Scripture passage and/or the reflection questions. It is helpful for everyone to hear and/or read along with the same translation. Typically, the same text is read twice by two different readers. A variation is to read a second translation.
- If you are Dwelling in the Word on Zoom, make sure the host has enabled the share screen and breakout rooms options in settings.

Prepare to Listen

- The leader provides a brief introduction to the practice of Dwelling in the Word - more if the practice is new to any member in the group; less if it is a developed practice. For example:
“Dwelling in the Word is a time of prayerful and communal reflection on a passage of Scripture. We will hear God’s Word read twice, allowing for silence between the readings. Are there two volunteers who would be our readers? I will let you know when to read. As we listen to the text, consider these questions; feel free to write down any reflections if you’d like.”
 - What captures my attention?
 - What questions do I have? What do I wonder?
 - Where might God’s Spirit be nudging us?

After we hear God’s Word, you will have a few minutes to share our responses [with a partner]. These can be simply words or phrases that stand out for you, with or without explanation.”

Listening

- The leader opens with a prayer asking God to open our hearts and speak to us.
- Ask the first reader to read the text slowly.
- Allow for silence.
- Invite the second reader to read the text again.
- Allow for silence.

Reflecting

- The leader instructs people to pair up and share responses; words or phrases; with or without explanation. “Listen carefully to your partner; after sharing with each other, you will be sharing *some of your partner’s responses* with the whole group (or a table group).” (On Zoom, host selects break out rooms and the amount of time desired (4 or 5 minutes); the number of rooms is your participants divided by two. The host will be able to join any room after activating the rooms. At the end of the allotted time, participants will return to the full group.)
- After a few minutes, remind people to switch to let the other person share if they haven’t already.
- After a few more minutes, have people gather with their partner at a table of 6-8, or in the large group. With their partner’s permission, let people share what their partner heard and wondered.
- After a few more minutes, if not already gathered as the whole group, bring everyone together, ask for any other sharing. After hearing responses, ask “Where might God’s Spirit be nudging us?” (There may or may not be much response but allow time for people to process the question after everything they’ve heard.) The leader does not have to answer questions or respond directly to what is shared.

Acting

- The leader invites participants to keep the Scripture in mind throughout the meeting and encourages participants to share reflections from the text throughout the time together. What does the text say in the midst of the meeting/gathering and making decisions?
- You may decide to end your time together by reading the text one more time and invite reflections on how the passage influenced discussion and/or planning.
- Close with a prayer, asking God to continue speaking to the group through the Scripture.
- Bring the Scripture text to the group in the same manner at the next meeting or gathering.