



Imago Dei: Seeing as God Sees

Bishop's Annual Address
Synod Assembly 2026



Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA

Lutherans Together: Loving God, Loving Neighbor

What do you see?

We are made in the image of God — Imago Dei. This truth transforms how we see ourselves and one another.

"What would change if we actually believed that every person bears the image of God?"



Psalm 139

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully
made.

Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.



The Question That Changes Everything

We are made in the image of God — Imago Dei. This truth transforms how we see ourselves and one another.

"What would change if we actually believed that every person bears the image of God?"





The church has an image problem

Not a branding problem.
Not a communications problem.
An image problem – in the deepest,
most theological sense of that word.

Who We See

**"Are we seeing
those Jesus saw?"**

The marginalized, the outcast, the overlooked — those Jesus welcomed to his table.

How We Are Seen

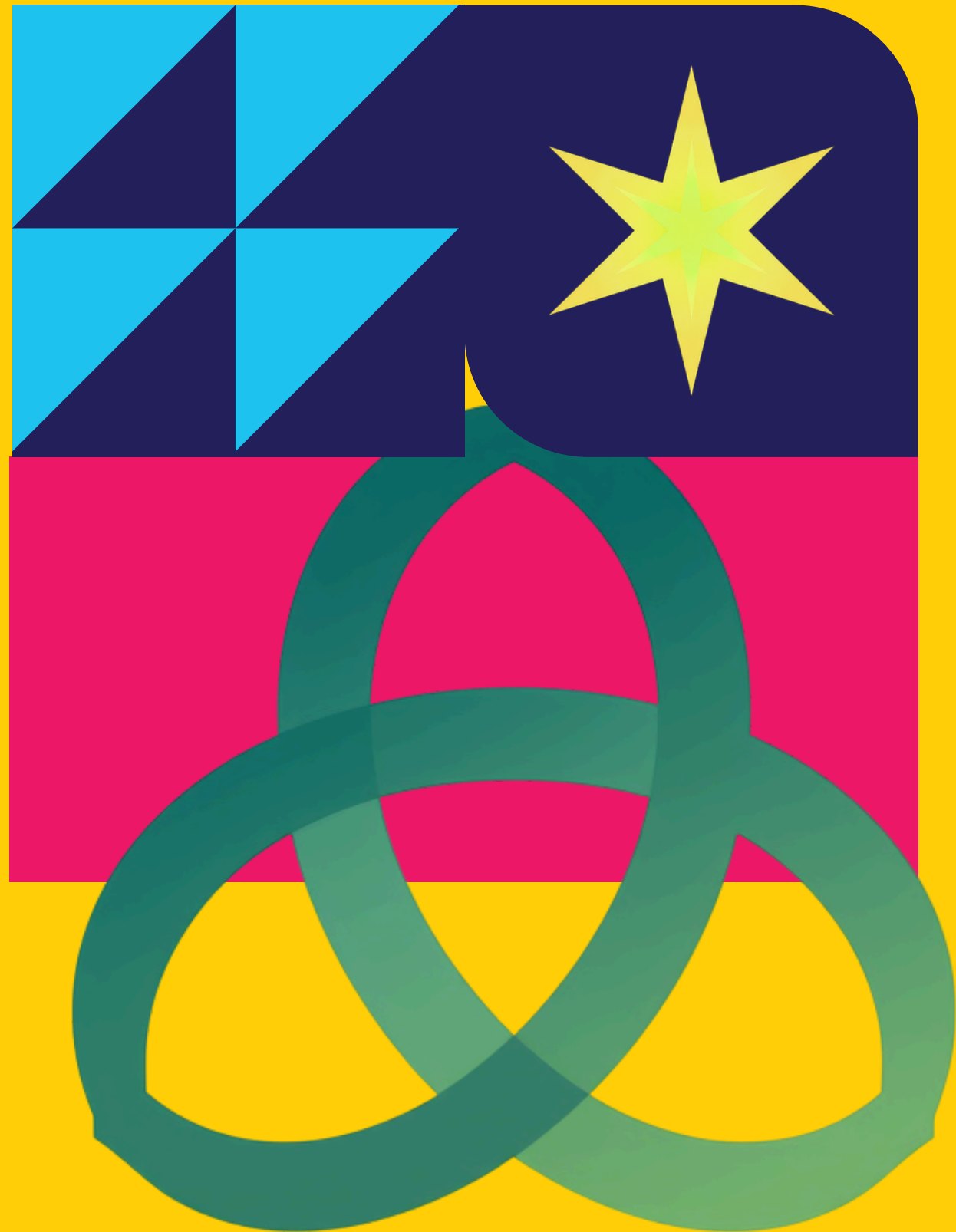
**"Judgmental,
hypocritical,
irrelevant."**

The church's image problem isn't about branding — it's theological. It's about whether we truly see the Imago Dei in every person.

imago dei



Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA + Synod Assembly



The Trinity and Community

The Trinity models diversity in unity — the divine image is communal.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in perfect relationship — distinct yet one. This divine community reveals that the image of God is not found in isolation but in relationship. We reflect God most fully when we embrace diversity within unity.

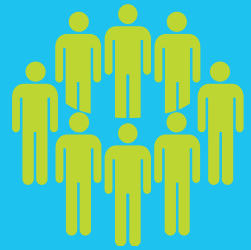


Baptism Promises

Baptism calls us to live, serve, and strive for justice and peace.

Baptism is liberation, not assimilation. Through these waters, we are called into a community that demands action and promises transformation.

Promises of Baptism



Live among God's
Faithful People



Hear God's word
and share in his
supper



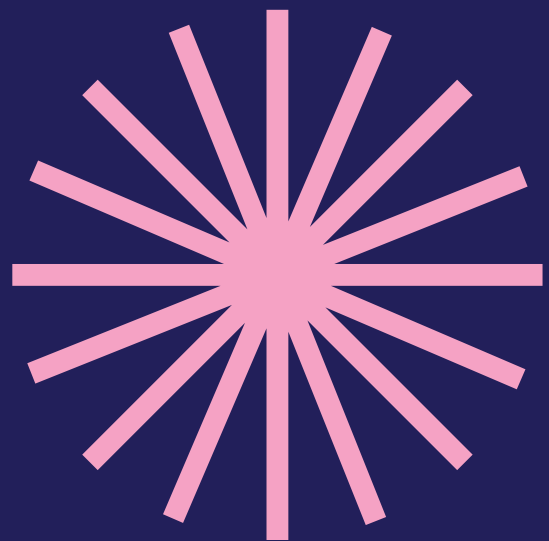
Proclaim the good
news of Jesus in
word and deed



Serve all people
following the
example of Jesus



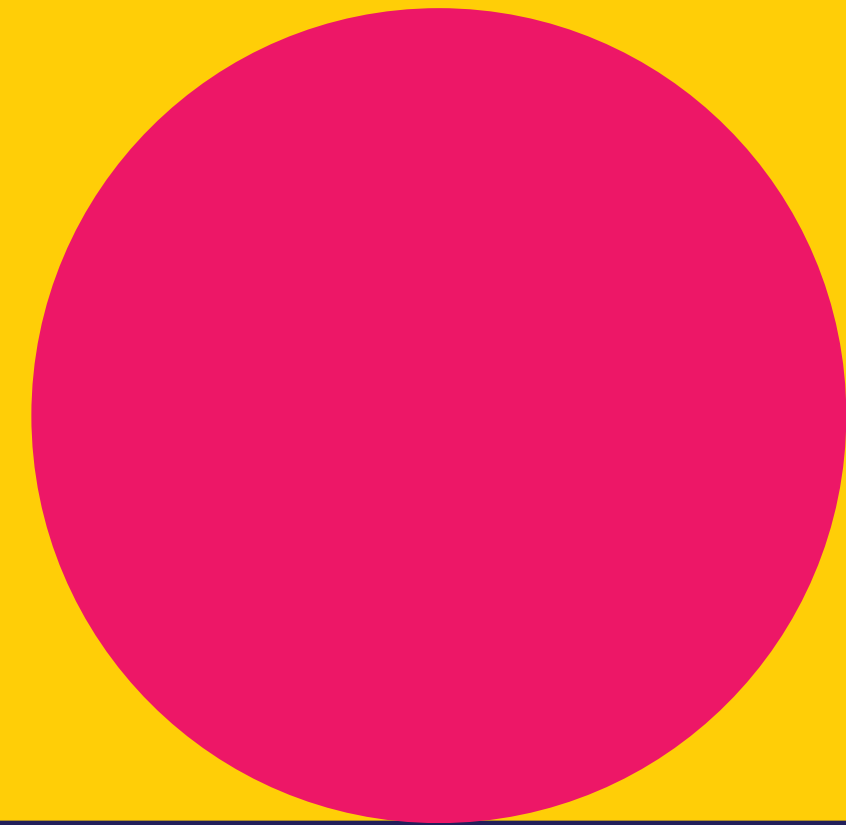
Strive for justice
and peace in all
the earth





What if.....

What if 'Go and make disciples' is less about importing our culture and more about seeing God's fingerprints on every face, in every community, in every tradition that has been shaped by the Spirit?



Mirrors for the Church



"I don't see color" erases God-given identity and diversity.



Accessibility is Imago Dei expressed in architecture.



Neurodiversity sees what the church needs most.

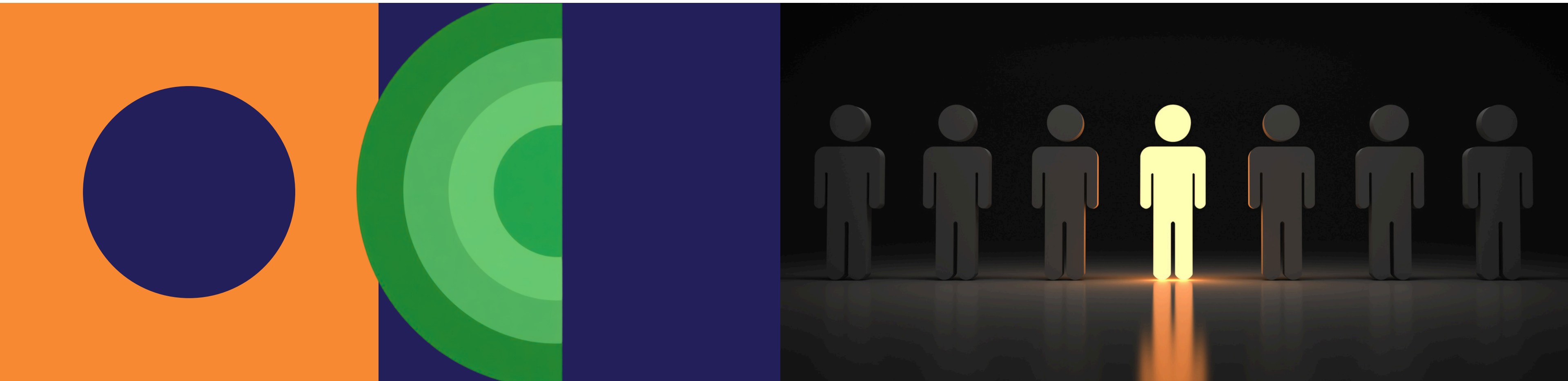


"The kingdom belongs to such as these" — children matter.



The Old Story We Keep Telling

The church must resist "othering" and celebrate diversity as divine. When we see through the lens of Imago Dei, difference becomes gift, not threat.



ELCA Statement

'We seek authentic diversity not as an option but in obedience to the Great Commandment, in affirmation of our baptismal promise, in proclamation of the gospel, and toward the restoration of God's beloved community from the brokenness we have created.'

That is a strong claim. And it is the right one.





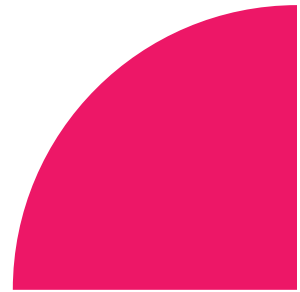
Ad Fontes

Back to the Source

Return to the essentials:

- Genesis
- Psalm 139
- The Great Commandment.

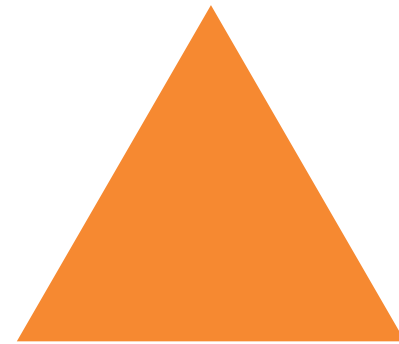
Healing



Healing begins with honesty and lament.

We must acknowledge our wounds and the wounds we have caused before true restoration can begin.

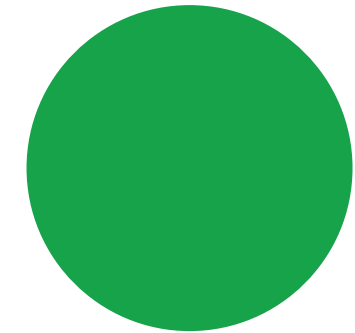
Justice



Justice restores right relationships.

Biblical justice is not punishment but the mending of broken bonds between God, neighbor, and creation.

Joy



Joy celebrates diversity as divine delight.

God looked at all of creation — all of us — and called it very good.



What We Do Next

The church that really sees the image of God in every person is the church the world is hungry for.



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Ad Fontes

Back to the beginning
when God called it, "good."



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