



Northwest Washington Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

August 24, 2009

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ;

By now the news of what happened at the Churchwide Assembly is being reported in a variety of ways. I share this from my perspective as a member of that assembly and as bishop of this synod. There were many things voted upon at this assembly that did not come from the Human Sexuality Task Force. We authorized major fund raising campaigns to fight Malaria and HIV/Aids. We established a sixth full communion relationship with the United Methodist Church.

All of the members of the assembly from this Synod participated in the sessions and in the discussions that surrounded the actions of the assembly. Pastor Jimmy Hao did have to return to Seattle early, so I appointed Pastor Vic Langford to serve in Jimmy's place on Saturday, August 22. Jimmy represented us very well as a musician at one of the services of worship and sharing as one of the speakers from growing congregations. The whole church now knows about the good work that Jimmy and Grace Chinese Lutheran Church are doing.

Obviously the votes adopting the social statement and on ministry policies received much publicity. The assembly embodied both the pain and the joy of these decisions. This is a time for us to continue to listen carefully to each other. The concept of bound conscience is a new lens for us to look at our relationships. We will need careful study and sharing about how we will live with this perspective. I would welcome an opportunity to be in conversation with you in the coming months and years about what does this mean for us as a church and as congregations and individuals.

After the assembly concluded the Conference of Bishops met to share our understandings of where we are now and how we will move forward. We agreed that the decisions of the assembly do not bring immediate change. We know we are moving in new directions, but the processes for that movement are now to be established. Until we have good order, we will not act individually as bishops or as synods to implement these decisions apart from the whole church.

I do believe that we are called to serve through the congregations of this synod in the mission field of Northwest Washington. The focus of our mission is Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Our message has not changed. We spend far too much time talking to ourselves about how we want to order the structures of the church and not enough on serving the neighbor in word and deed.

I want to propose that we study the book of Acts between now and the first Sunday in Advent, Nov. 29, 2009. I am still working on the logistics of this. I am toying with the idea of sharing a daily or weekly reflection on the synod's website. The book of Acts is about the Holy Spirit's creation of the church and the church's movement in mission to the world. It strikes me that this is what we need to hear and do yet again.

The assembly prayed constantly for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I know that many of you were praying for the assembly and I thank you for those prayers. We continued in prayer in the face of disagreement, debate and even a tornado. Not everyone will agree that we heard the Spirit correctly. So we continue in pray so that we may remember that this is Christ's church and not ours. I want to encourage you to view or read the statements of Bishop Hanson regarding the ministry policy recommendations and at the close of the assembly. Both of these statements are on the ELCA website, www.elca.org/assembly.

The 11th churchwide assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is now history. How it will be remembered is still to be decided. My prayer is that we will remember this assembly for the work of establishing new congregations, calling new people to Christ, acting with global partners to defeat malaria and HIV/Aids, and showing us that our unity is in Christ who gives us life. Now is the time for us to walk with each other in humility. We remember the theme of the assembly, "God's work. Our hands." It is God's work that our hands are to be about.

Thank you for the opportunity to see the work of the larger church and for sharing in that work. I look forward to further discussion with you about how your congregation will take that work into your hands and share it in God's world.

Grace and Peace,

Wm Chris Boerger
Bishop