

Deans, Rostered leaders, and Voting members,

I write to offer a very simple thank you for the just completed Synod Assembly. It seems to me that we have been through something quite remarkable, not because of any particular vote or result, but because of the way we were church together.

I think I have been changed by this event and I'm very grateful. The change is not well-defined for me yet, but it has something to do with the conversation around the "bound conscience" and a new level of respect and care for one another that we have reached. It has something to do with humility before the questions themselves and the way speakers spoke from well-integrated personalities and avoided inflammatory ideological positions.

Despite having gone deeper into the agenda than intended before reaching the heart of our conversation, we didn't show signs of anxiety or restlessness. The assembly held together through long speeches, lots of short reports, and all the other attendant pieces that have often aroused impatience. That didn't happen this year, despite the urgency and impatience and anxiety of our culture (Pandemic! Economic Depression! Uncertainty of Every Kind!).

Who shall we thank for this gift? It seems both natural and true to say this was the work of the Holy Spirit. I believe that, but I don't want it to be the only word spoken. Such attribution can seem to those who suffered loss on issues to be a too-convenient religious gloss on unwise decisions. I do thank God for this time together. I do thank our better spirits that gave us patience and calm in the midst of the vigorous contest for wisdom and faithfulness. Maybe we were just plain fortunate!

We were also very well led by Vice President Susan Berg, our parliamentarian Evan Sperline, our Finance Committee, and our Synod Council. The Synod Council meeting immediately before Assembly was remarkable in the same ways as our assembly; it was thoughtful, collegial, prayerful, missional, expectant. It was also very warm in gratitude for excellent members who now leave us for other service in the church. To offer them our prayers in the form of prayer shawls made by members at Lake Chelan Lutheran Church was quite appropriate and really lovely.

Some other random thoughts about what made this time unique and wonderful:

- Do you realize we never, not once, entertained the motion to close debate ("move the previous question")? This is, to me, a sign of the patience we offered one another: We didn't cut off debate. We let it flow and be. The blessed silence, waiting to see if someone else would come to the microphone, was a testimony to our good will for one another and for the variety of opinions we knew were present. This quiet patience itself elicited thanks from Erik Samuelson and David Kappus, giving all of us words for the gratitude we were feeling.
- At the Synod Council meeting before Assembly, one of our last acts was to elect two new members to the Executive Committee. This election would mean extra work and more responsibility. Eight candidates were surfaced with significant support, itself a good sign. Of those, only two withdrew before the election! And

this in a day when we assume each one of us is going to do everything possible to avoid new responsibilities!

- By his own admission our Churchwide representative, Marcus Kunz, spoke too long in his report! But on reflection he served as our teacher, bringing us the truth of Christian community from one of our most respected theologians, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Was it this reminder of the true nature of our community that freed us from unrealistic enthusiasm masquerading as pious faithfulness?
- We had an outstanding planning committee this year and their hard work paid off. Thanks again to Carol Nelson and committee she led, and to Karla Olson our assembly manager. Fresh fruit on the table. Wonderful convention center food. Earthy communion bread from Jean Scheid's bakery. Fresh flowers at the dais; braided wheat and apple blossoms on the altar. String music for Compline. A long, brightly lit and luxurious display area and a wonderful mix of items in the Lutheran Book Parlor book display. Diana Butler Bass, no "superstar *prima donna*" but a source of deep encouragement that our Great Commission/Great Commandment commitments are true and holy and faithful. We heard the reminder that we have a solid companion ministry in Tanzania, a partner that depends on us and offers us gifts in return.

So many things to be grateful for.

The work is not done and the substance of some of our decisions will be upsetting for some of our members and congregations. The wording of Resolution 11, which passed by 62%, is that we "memorialize" the Churchwide Assembly "to adopt" both the proposed social statement and the Ministry Policy recommendations.

My own sense is that this memorial is meant as an encouragement that the Social Statement be passed and that we enter expectantly the four-step process proposed by the Ministry Policy recommendations. I say it that way because I don't believe the Ministry Policy recommendations so much recommend a particular result as they recommend a patient process for thoughtful, faithful, respectful consideration of the questions before our church, with full acknowledgement of the deep disagreement that still exists in the Body. I think we can expect the next months, before Churchwide, to be filled with commentary on what it means to change a policy while intending to honor those who must, for the sake of the faith they hold, resist such change. I pray we can continue the tone and substance of our assembly as our congregations consider these questions further.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Martin

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Bishop