

*As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:12-17*

To the congregations and leaders of our Church in the Eastern Washington and Idaho Synod:  
Grace and Peace to you in Jesus' name.

I won't suppose to know how you feel today about the Church's decisions in Minneapolis. Let it be enough to tell you that I've got both a stomach-ache and an ardent hope that we have stepped out in faith. I am thinking of you today, praying with and for you right now. The text from Ezra 3:10-13 is instructive. There the Israelites' experienced both anticipation and pain as they returned from exile to the ruins of the Temple. This was hope and deep sadness, achingly mixed.

I'm also learning something new about the nature of faith. I don't take a lot of risks in my life. I don't usually ask a question unless I think I know the answer. Most of my life is carefully calculated. Now our Church has committed itself to "a path as yet untrodden, through perils unknown." We pray for "faith to go out with good courage" but this time the faith needed feels very tangible and real.

I do have some specific requests:

Pray for our Church. Let us pray this prayer together: "*Gracious Father, we pray for your holy catholic church. Fill it with all truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in need, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it, for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen* (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p.73)

Please take time to orient yourself to what actually happened in Minneapolis rather than reacting to the rumor mill. My daily notes are now posted at [www.ewaidsynod.org](http://www.ewaidsynod.org). Soon you will find reports from the other Voting Members from our synod. The official (preliminary) actions of the Assembly are posted at [www.elca.org/assembly](http://www.elca.org/assembly). In particular I encourage you to read or watch Bishop Hanson in his remarks following the votes on the Ministry Policies: See <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Secretary/ELCA-Governance/Churchwide-Assembly.aspx>.

Please bear the burden of those with whom you disagree. This paragraph from Prof. Tim Wengert's paper on the bound conscience is the heart of this call: "... *concern for the bound conscience is not simply a matter of toleration for different points of view but more profoundly realizing that the neighbor's conscience is bound to a totally different, perhaps even incorrect, understanding of the matter and that to uproot that understanding would shake the neighbor's faith and trust in God's mercy and forgiveness.*"

Take time to ask the quintessentially Lutheran question: What does this mean? Please give your church time to ponder what has happened and begin the work necessary to frame the implications of these decisions. This work is just beginning but won't have even tentative shape until after the ELCA Church Council meets in November. I will be at that meeting and will report back to you on the direction of the thinking.

Please remember everything we've learned together from Michael Nel and Family Systems thinking. The reactive brain is good for emergencies but not for the thoughtful engagement that the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment commends to us: "*We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.*" (ELW, p. 1161)

I ask that you finish this budget year according to your budget plan. Some are calling for punitive action. Redirection of benevolence is a blunt and crude weapon that will harm innocent people and much that is good about our church. We need our congregations to stay strong and thoughtful for the sake of mission. If we need to plan differently for 2010 we'll talk that through this fall.

I'm a visual person and I'm drawn to the metaphor of the Body of Christ and our "member"-ship in it. Two images have been in my prayer lately. The first is a picture of a muscle that has been pushed past healthy exercise and is now torn in damaging ways. We need a Great Physician to bring healing to this body and time for the body to repair and rebuild itself.

The second image is of the body walking. Synod is a word that means "to walk the way together." Walking is a complex matter and involves "members" that move in opposition to one another. To walk is to exercise balance and that balance is achieved when two things happen simultaneously: pushing forward and braking. Some would say we have just begun to walk again after years of being stuck. Others are anxious to jump on the brakes before we get into deeper trouble. Neither the toes pushing nor the heel digging in is disloyal and both are crucial to walking the way of our Lord Jesus, himself the Way. What seems clear is that we need one another in order to follow Jesus and fulfill the mission he gave us.

God bless you on this Way.

Pr. Martin Wells, Bishop