

I-K Lutheran

Where God is doing new things

August 2017

[This month's article from Bishop Gafkjen is adapted from the third and final part of his verbal report to the 2017 Synod Assembly.]

We believe that by our own understanding or strength we cannot believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called us through the gospel, enlightened us with his gifts, made us holy, and kept us in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith...



As summer's end appears on the horizon, for many of us our attention turns toward the return to more regular and rigorous school, church, and work schedules. Leaders of faith communities are planning fall programming in hope of providing transforming encounters with God. At the same time, many members and friends of those same faith communities are beginning to think about a return to more regular participation in the life of their congregation in hope of growing in faith and service. In whatever way we find ourselves turning our attention toward fall, perhaps Martin Luther's explanation to the third article of the Apostolic Creed might be helpful to keep in mind.

After all, the various forms of transformation we seek – deep, life-giving change in our faith communities, in our own lives, and in the world – are the work of the Spirit. Transformation most often begins with a renewal of our own hearts, our own conversion. I know, “conversion” is not a word we Lutherans use very often. But, recall the very first of the 95 Theses Martin posted 500 years ago.

Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying “Repent,” wanted the entire life of the faithful to be one of repentance.

The transformation of the Spirit begins with repentance, which is itself a reflection of the conversion the Spirit works in our own hearts, as individuals and as communities of faith. God's gracious Spirit turns us away from what is self-centered or inwardly turned, and turns us outward, as individuals and as faith communities, toward God, toward the other, toward those who have been excluded or lost or denigrated or harmed or who are desperate for a word of hope.

In that way, we are converted, again and again. We are transformed to serve God and love neighbor, entrusting ourselves and our world to the promise of new, abundant, and lasting life, the joy on the other side that compelled Jesus himself to endure the cross [see Hebrews 12:1-2].

Okay, here it comes, Isaiah 43:19: “I am about to do a new thing, even now it springs forth; do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness, waters in the desert.”

Why does God promise this? Why does God's Spirit transform us? Why is God continually doing new things and converting us by daily calling us back to the death and resurrection of baptism? Isaiah 43:20 provides an answer: So that “the people whom I formed for myself...might declare my praise.”

We are transformed in the power of the Spirit **to declare God's praise**. The transformation we seek certainly brings us wholeness, healing, and hope. But it doesn't end there. The transformation of the Spirit is not tinkering for tinkering's sake. It's not so any of us can get our way. It's not even so we or our institutions or communities will survive.

God's Spirit works God's way in us so that God will have effective witnesses to God's goodness and grace in this troubled, often not-so-good, graceless world. God needs a people to declare God's praise in a world that so often forgets or denies there is a God to praise. That people would be us.

What I'm getting at, friends, is that you should simply keep on doing what you've done from the beginning... Better yet, redouble your efforts. Be energetic in your life of salvation, reverent and sensitive before God. That energy is God's energy, an energy deep within you, God himself willing and working at what will give him the most pleasure. [Philippians 2:12-13, The Message]

+Bishop Bill Gafkjen



Dear IK Synod Leaders:

I am writing to invite you to participate in the ELCA Welcoming Congregations Network of AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities). The network was initiated by the Southwest California Synod in response to a declaration of a joint commitment to migrant ministry signed by the ELCA bishops of the companion synods with the church in El Salvador and has now expanded to other ELCA synods. Now this network is being developed here in our Indiana-Kentucky Mission Territory.

Welcoming Congregations make a commitment to:

- welcome and minister to migrant guests and identify a contact person in the congregation who speaks enough Spanish for basic communication;
- attend occasional meetings of the Welcoming Congregations Network in your synod for mutual support, fellowship and training;
- participate in conference calls for updates on the current situation of migration of children and families and receive policy updates; and
- advocate for public policy that will positively impact the current immigration crisis – including working in partnership with the ELCA Washington Office and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service on immigration reform.

Becoming a Welcoming Congregation does not require a commitment by the whole congregation but rather a commitment by the pastor and a small

team of members. Welcoming Congregations are not offering shelter or employment but merely are willing to be a church home for migrant children and families in the same way that congregations of several generations ago welcomed Lutheran migrants from Europe and helped them navigate life in their new home.

Joining the Welcoming Congregations Network provides congregations with a concrete and feasible strategy for connecting local and global mission while increasing their witness and capacity for ministry to the immigrant community. It is also a powerful way to respond to God's call in Matthew 25 – to welcome our Lord Jesus as he comes to us in the stranger.

The ELCA AMMPARO website and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service also offer a wide variety of biblical and practical educational resources on immigration, including information on immigration policy and reform efforts. Information on the legal right of congregations to minister to and with undocumented individuals and families is available upon request.

I hope that you will prayerfully consider participating in this effort. If you discern that your congregation is called to be a WELCOMING CONGREGATION, please contact me at nnyland@iksynod.org

Blessings,
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