



March 9, 2010

Conference of Bishops

+Bishop Jon Anderson

Today concludes our Conference of Bishops meeting. It has been a rich and helpful gathering. While I am thankful to be able to serve in this group, I am also ready to go home and see my family this morning.

The meeting began for me late on Wednesday afternoon as I started towards the airport to catch a flight to Chicago. Our meetings began promptly on Thursday morning. As I was driving in I was aware of how far behind I am in returning calls and in my non-crucial email. Normally the spring meeting is the one meeting spouses are invited to. This time, Robyn could not attend. I hoped that I would make headway on the letters, emails and phone calls in the openings around the meeting. I did in some cases, but the work continues to be deep these days.

Thursday morning we had our Region 3 meeting. Our region is made up of the six synods in Minnesota and the three in the Dakotas. Our new Regional Coordinator, Paul Baglyos, led our time together. The primary work was the assignment of seminarians to synods. We were blessed to receive a great group of seminary students for our synod's future.

We are excited to welcome...

- ✚ Linda Wimmer – Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago
- ✚ Andrew Schenstad – Luther Seminary
- ✚ Willie Rosin – Wartburg
- ✚ Bethany McCaughen – Luther
- ✚ Jennifer Thul – Luther
- ✚ Joseph Midthun – Luther

In the afternoon, as a member of the Theological and Ethical Concerns Committee, we were able to discuss the coming work of the Church in Society Social Statement team, particularly the Genetics Social Statement Draft that will be available later this month. But what stood out was a sermon in worship by one of my colleagues that talked about his child's search for a church home and in particular about the church she has chosen for her church home. It was powerful because bishops, like all Christians, long for our children to walk in the faith...and we pray that God will continue to renew and reform the church to speak to them and their children.

In the evening we began one of the major conversations of this gathering. We had small group conversations about the future of our church body. How is God calling us to serve the Gospel in the coming years? While there are many challenges, many things to grieve and many decisions to make at this meeting, we looked over the horizon and spent time dreaming together.

Friday morning after opening worship, we continued our focus on the future of our church body. I was the first of three speakers asked to address the question of “What is God’s preferred future for the ELCA?” focusing particularly on what the church body might look like and do its work on by the time we hit 2017 (The 500th anniversary of the Reformation). It was a privilege to be asked and helpful to me to begin to think about our shared future. I will share some of my thoughts at our synod assembly.

Another part of our meeting was a focus on policies related to the churchwide action on gay and lesbian pastors in intimate relationships. The conference worked hard to try to craft policies that will serve this church body well. I often wish you could be in the room with us as we labor on these kinds of matters. You would see a group of leaders, from significantly different contexts, with different lines of sight laboring to serve the Gospel and our church body in this time.

Saturday during Bp. David Brauer Riecke’s (Oregon) sharing of his vision for our future, I was reminded in his photography and poetry that the Lutheran Church does not always look like the Midwest. His image for our future was built around the rain forests in the Northwest. Again we took time to discuss in small groups. The rest of the day was spent listening to reports from the officers of our church body. This is a time of significant challenges, swift changes, grief and surprising opportunities in our church body. I trust you will read the press releases on all this.

Sunday we heard a third presentation on our future by Bp. Elizabeth Eaton and had further discussion. The most powerful part of this day for me was our farewell for Bp. Jim Stuck – one of my mentors and friends. As I think of Jim retiring, it is a reminder of my own aging and all the fine colleagues who have completed their service in this group. Jim has been a champion of discipleship and shared a deep passion for evangelizing. We pray God will continue to lift up gifted leaders in the coming days especially in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod.

Monday was the day we heard committees of the Conference bring their reports. This is how we share the work and develop particular expertise within the conference. We also heard reports on the LIFT (Ecology) Task Force about their work of examining the changing mission field on which we serve and how we are called to be reforming our work as a denomination to serve the Gospel in this time. We also heard a final recommendation on how we will work through the issue of the seventeen Extraordinary Lutheran Ministry pastors who were ordained in irregular ways.

Through the breaks and evenings, people sit in the lobby where the internet is free to do their email. The halls are full of people making phone calls, talking to staff and leaders in their synods. There is laughter, lamenting, mentoring and listening going on as well. It has been an important and good meeting, but I am ready to go home see my family and focus on the work of our state and synod. The pile of email, letters and calls has grown smaller, but it is far from conquered.

Thanks for your leadership and work in the past week as you have proclaimed the Good News we know in Christ Jesus.