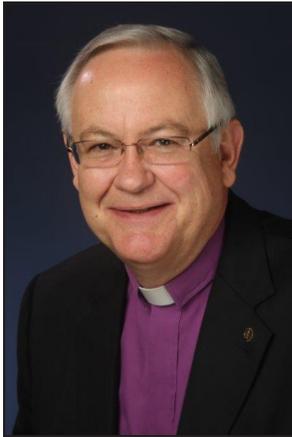


The Spirit

Who First Introduced You to Grace?

by the Rev. Kirby Unti, Bishop



One of the great joys of attending the Churchwide Assembly is the new people that you meet. We spent an evening out with our sister Synod – Southwestern Texas. Kim and I sat with a couple from a little town situated between Austin and Houston. They told us the story about how their church painfully divided over the

2009 Statement on Human Sexuality. They had to part ways with friends they had known and loved their entire lives. This couple along with a handful of others was committed to staying in the ELCA. So they set out on their own to establish a new congregation. Fast forward four years and they have purchased a wonderful new worship space, are growing in membership and are able to meet their financial obligations.

A second part of the conversation we had that night was about the Texas legal system. It is one of the harshest systems in the country with severe penalties for even lesser offenses. Steve is a criminal defense attorney and very knowledgeable about how justice works in Texas. It struck me that here was a couple of “true grace” in the midst of a very rigid community with little or

no tolerance for anyone or anything that was considered out of bounds. It caused me to ask the question, “How did you learn about grace?”

Steve went on to tell the story of one of his clients who as a teenager murdered his own mother. Everyone in the family turned against this young man. Everyone that is, with the exception of his grandmother. Grandma managed to stay in touch with the young man throughout his incarceration. He ended up serving a lengthy term before being granted parole. The challenge of his parole was that he needed to have a place to live and a person who would vouch for his whereabouts. By now his grandfather had died and the other family members had written him off. Grandma stepped forward and offered her home and friendship. Today this young man is a contributing citizen in his community. Steve has maintained a close relationship with him. Grandma is in the nursing home. Steve continues to visit her and every time he sees her she inquires about how her grandson is doing? It was this wonderful grandmother who taught a Texas defense attorney the meaning of grace.

People of grace tend to find each other. Consequently in the middle of the dirt fields of the Southwestern Texas Synod there exists an oasis called, Grace Lutheran Church.

Do you remember who first introduced you to grace?

**The installation of Bishop Kirby Unti will be held at
2 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 15, at Saint Mark’s Episcopal Cathedral
1245 Tenth Ave. East, Seattle (206.323.0300; www.saintmarks.org)
Unti will be installed by ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson. All are welcome.**

2013 Churchwide Assembly Highlights

The 952 Voting members of the 2013 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) made a number of key decisions to further the mission and ministry of this church. The assembly, the chief legislative authority of the church, gathered Aug. 12-17 at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center in Pittsburgh.

Highlights:

- + Elected the Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Bishop of the ELCA Northeastern Ohio Synod, as ELCA Presiding Bishop. She will be installed Oct. 5 in Chicago and will begin her six-year term Nov. 1.
- + Elected the Rev. Wm Chris Boerger as ELCA secretary. Boerger was installed during the assembly's closing worship Aug. 16 and will begin his six-year term Nov. 1.
- + Adopted a social statement entitled, "The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries." Additionally, the assembly adopted the supporting implementing resolutions. The statement calls ELCA members to ministry and compassion through practices including: hearing the cries of those affected, accompaniment, hospitality and advocacy.
- + Approved a proposal for the ELCA's first major fundraising campaign. The five-year campaign, to begin in 2014, is designed to increase this church's capacity to renew and start new congregations, educate and develop its leaders, bolster its global mission efforts and expand the impact of its relief and development work. Voting members approved two more campaign initiatives -- encouraging and forming lay youth and young adult leaders and support for disability ministry.
- + Agreed to continue the Book of Faith initiative that invites the 4-million-member ELCA to become fluent in the first language of our faith -- the language of Scripture -- and to be renewed for lives of witness and service.
- + Approved the ELCA churchwide organization budget for fiscal years 2014-2016.
- + Elected ELCA members to serve on various groups: (NWWA Synod members noted) Church Council, Portico Benefit Services (Pastor Paul Summe-Diers,) Mission Investment Fund, Augsburg Fortress, Committee on Appeals (Mark Johnson,) Committee on Discipline, Nominating Committee (Stacy Kitahata.)
- + Adopted a series of amendments to the ELCA Constitutions, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions.
- + Considered memorials -- resolutions from the ELCA's 65 synods -- on topics including Holy Communion, immigration reform, the Middle East, pastoral ministry to same-gender couples and their families, the Uniting American Families Act, community violence, gender identity, immigration detention, hydraulic fracturing, fossil fuels and more.

The assembly will transition from a biennial to a triennial schedule with the next assembly meeting August 2016 in New Orleans. For more detailed information, check the ELCA Website: www.elca.org

The Spirit, a publication of the Northwest Washington Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), is intended for members, leaders, and clergy of synod congregations and organizations. Congregations are encouraged to copy ***The Spirit*** and include it in their own newsletters. ***The Spirit*** can be downloaded from the Synod website.

Northwest Washington Synod, ELCA

5519 Phinney Ave North
Seattle, WA 98103-5829
Telephone: 206-783-9292
Toll Free: 1-800-244-6997
Fax: 206-783-9833

Email: office@lutheransnw.org
Website: www.lutheransnw.org

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