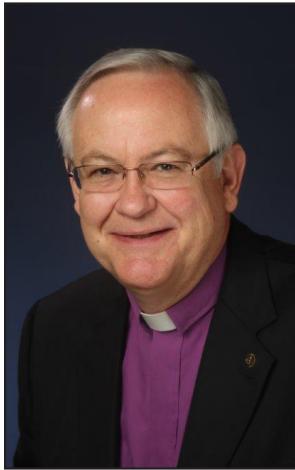


The Spirit

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Grace Always?

by the Rev. Kirby Unti, Bishop



It has always been important to me that the words I use align with my own sense of sincerity. This is particularly important to me when it comes to the use of religious language. I have been struggling since I entered the Office of Bishop to come up with a closing for the letters that I write that passes the sincerity test.

"Sincerely yours," meets the test but it is a bit too bland and formal for me.

The one that I have been leaning towards is, "Grace always." I used it a number of times before becoming aware of some inner resistance. How could I resist grace? It is at the heart and center of what I believe and most adequately defines for me the heart of God. The more I poked around in the resistance I began to realize that it might sound too Pollyannaish or worst yet it might appear as "cheap grace." Cheap grace is defined as grace without the cross. This caused me to wrestle more deeply about what do I believe about grace?

I remember hearing Mike Breen talk about grace as an umbrella implying that one could fall outside of the umbrella of grace. This just doesn't work for me. Grace is either grace or it isn't. It seems to me when one needs it the most is precisely when one falls outside the acceptable boundaries of forgiveness and acceptance.

While we were yet weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous person – though perhaps for good person one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Romans 5:6-8

This for me places the cross right in the center of grace – all grace. Yes even cheap grace. I would rather err on the side of cheap grace than turn grace into something that one must be worthy of. Yet the tension in me still questions my sincerity in claiming, "Grace Always." I thank God as a Lutheran that this tension is affirmed. In fact I am confident the tension lies somewhere in between my being at one and the same time a Saint and a Sinner.

What I do know for certain is the joy that I experience when I watch someone discovering grace for the first time. I was with a friend recently and every time she tried to explain why she was becoming a Lutheran all she could do was cry. She had spent far too much of her life striving to do right and live according to the impossible expectations of her faith community. Her life embraced by grace instead of guilt and shame has overwhelmed her with a flood of tears. She is drowning daily in the Grace Waters of baptism.

I will continue to struggle with the tension. Meanwhile, don't be surprised if you receive a letter from me signed, "Grace always!" Or on days when I am not as confident in my convictions, "May Grace Abound."

Stay in touch and in the know!

Synod Website Calendar - www.lutheransnw.org/calendar

Do you receive the Weekly Update eNews? www.lutheransnw.org/subscribe

Assembly Wrap Up

All Resolutions Passed

Five resolutions were passed by the assembly. The first welcomed our newest congregation, Church of Steadfast Love. Two resolutions encouraged seeking peace in the Holy Land. These were approved as amended. The final two encouraged care of creation. You may read the full text on the synod assembly webpage: www.lutheransnw.org/2015-Synod-Assembly. Briefly, here is what passed:

- + to welcome the Church of Steadfast Love as a congregation or our synod. (Welcome & congratulations!)
- + to memorialize the 2016 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA to ask for Congressional action requiring that future U.S. aid to Israel be contingent on Israel's halt to all settlement-building in the West Bank and that the US in coordination with the UN security council launch a more determined effort for a negotiated agreement that ends the occupation, achieves an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel and provides security and peace for both Israelis and Palestinians.
- + that synod congregations ask for Congressional action applying these conditions to future aid to Israel by advocating such action to their district's U.S. House Member and both of Washington State's U.S. Senators; and that the Bishop make this resolution's call known to the members of Washington State's Congressional delegation who serve citizens living in our synod and to the public at large.
- + to memorialize the 2016 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA to make climate change and ecological justice major themes in ELCA planning and activities leading up to and following the observance of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.
- + to find ways to enact the 2013 Churchwide Assembly action to "support and encourage synods, congregations, members, the churchwide organization, and agencies and institutions of this church to adopt and advocate for policies that reduce energy use, and with it our dependence on fossil fuels, as an expression of this church's commitment to address climate change and to care for God's creation" and "to reexamine lifestyles and environmental footprints as they relate to the climate crisis and to improve their stewardship of energy resources and promote care for God's creation;" and that the synod commit itself to participate with the ELCA in becoming even more faithfully a denomination that embraces and practices creation care throughout its life and mission.

Election Results

MANY thanks to all who allowed their names to come forward as nominees for various positions. The following were elected:

Synod Consultation Committee

Pastor Bob Lewis
Pastor Tim Wolbrecht
David Swartling
Stacy Kitahata

Synod Committee on Discipline

Pastor Penelope Guntermann
Pastor Katy McCallum Sachse
Paul A. Anderson
Joanne Hinkle

2016 Churchwide Assembly Voting Members

Tyler Bates
Hannah Berg
Pastor Tor Berg
Franklin Chu
Sister Liz Colver
Pastor Ivar Hillesland
Pastor Jennifer Schultz
Sojin Thompson
Bishop Kirby Unti and Synod Vice President
Georganne Robertson will also attend, by virtue of their positions in the synod.

Thank you!

Many thanks to all who worked tirelessly to make the assembly a success: serving on the planning team & various assembly committees; our fabulous volunteers who helped out prior to & during the assembly, those who graciously gave presentations & led discussions; our friends who shared about their ministries at the display tables; and all the gracious voting members, observers and visitors who joined together in worship, business and conversation. "Can We Talk" - yes, we can!

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