



**South-Central Synod of Wisconsin  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

December 19, 2019

## Some Reflections on our Journey Together

*An Occasional (pretty much monthly) Letter from Bishop Peter Rogness*

Dear Ministry Partners,

This year is drawing to a close, and with it the first segment of my time with you during this transition period – that segment being the conversations I've now had with rostered leadership in each of the twelve conferences of the synod. I'm closing in on finishing my first three months here. So I thought I'd pass along a few observations I've come to have in this time. In no particular order...

- I've had a great time in the 12 conference conversations. We have an abundance of fine, faithful rostered leaders caring for the congregations of this synod. This is a more challenging moment in history to be a pastor – and to be a congregation for that matter! – and I've gained an appreciation for the commitment to ministry I see, the valuing of collegiality, the candor in talking about life here.
- The most common view of the past year is one of sadness, a feeling that the hopes of entering a new chapter in 2018 weren't realized. I didn't hear blaming or anger, and I don't think there are issues remaining that are a barrier hindering our movement into a healthier new chapter.
- I hear a great deal of affirmation and readiness to participate in the newly designed election process that begins next month with the Town Hall meetings.
- As has always been true for me, being in congregations on Sundays is always enlivening – good spirit, lay people who faithfully come and love their church, good worship.
- I've enjoyed good working relationships with staff and synod leadership. The synod staff is small, hard-working, competent, and has welcomed my involvement. The synod leadership – Executive Committee, Synod Council, Election task force, and Conference Deans – are a gifted and committed group of people. They too have welcomed and supported my presence. I'm grateful.
- And along the way I learn some things unexpected. On Monday Dan Rift from the ELCA Hunger Program stopped in the office – were you aware that the South Central Synod of Wisconsin is top among all 65 synods in per-member giving to the ELCA's World Hunger program?? A testimony to the congregational leaders who lift up the need of the world's hungry, and the people who respond to that need. I'm proud of this synod!

I enter the New Year with eager anticipation for what may lay ahead for the church in this place!

Finally, a couple comments about what's next:

The six Town Hall meetings take place between January 5 and February 9. Both rostered and lay members are encouraged to attend. I've said that it would be especially helpful for those lay members who anticipate being part of the assembly action electing a new bishop to participate in each step of the process, beginning with the Town Hall gatherings... but any interested lay people are welcome and invited to come.

Most of the Conference Nominating Caucuses have been scheduled – I think the remainder will be soon. We'll publish the list when it's complete. There was some question raised about who is eligible to come and vote, so the Executive Committee adopted this guideline:

“Each Conference may determine for itself eligibility for voting at the Conference Nominating Caucus. The Synod Executive Committee recommends that voting privileges be granted to each rostered minister present, and each congregation having two times the number of lay voting members allotted to their congregation for the synod assembly. It is encouraged that the lay members who will be voting members at this year's assembly be among those present.”

The guideline is offered in light of the fact that these caucuses are legislative in nature, so some guideline regarding eligibility for voting can be helpful, to avoid the possibility of undue influence by one congregation with many attendees. (I tend to doubt this is a likely problem, but a guideline like this is probably prudent.)

And finally, a Christmas thought...

We are overwhelmed with a blizzard of Church events, run frantic gathering with family and friends for parties and meals, decorating and shopping like mad. It can get to you, though I confess I love it all. Or at least most of it. It reaches a crescendo on the December 24, floats quietly on the 25<sup>th</sup>, then begins to fade as we take a breath for the rest of the Christmas/New Years break. But in the midst of it, at the heart of it, remember to take a long, slow, exhale, block out the frenzy, and remember what is at the center of it all:

*How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given.  
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.  
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin  
Where meek souls will receive him, still, the dear Christ enters in.*

I am privileged to be among you. I pray a rich and joyous culmination of Advent, a joyous celebration of Christ's birth, and a hope-filled ushering in of the new year.

Peace,



Peter Rogness  
Bishop