



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

Some Reflections on our Journey Together
An Occasional (pretty much monthly) Letter
from Bishop Peter Rogness

February 4, 2020

Dear Ministry Partners,

Bishop Herb Chilstrom

We lost an important person in the life of our church this past week. Bishop Herbert Chilstrom served as the first presiding bishop of the ELCA, 1987 (constituting Convention) until 1995. It was a critically formative period of this new church.

I came to know Herb when I was elected bishop of the (then) Southern Wisconsin District of the American Lutheran Church in the fall of 1985; Herb was the bishop of the Minnesota Synod of the LCA, and thus our neighbor. Bishops of the three uniting churches met often during the time leading up to the launch of the new church. I first came to know him well then.

There was considerable speculation that Bishop Chilstrom would be under heavy consideration as the person to lead this new church. Some ALC folks had impressions of the LCA as being authoritarian and foreboding... so I invited Herb to come to the 1986 Southern Wisconsin District Convention as a keynote presenter and Bible Study leader. Herb, a former professor, led us in a study of the church in the book of Acts. I remember hearing several responses along the line of "if this is what the LCA is like, we're going to be fine." His faith, authenticity, theology, and care of people shone through. And he led well.

His eyesight diminished as he aged (he was 88), but never his mind or his communication skill. He continued as a churchman, particularly as an advocate for policies caring for the common good, for full inclusion of all people in the life of the church and in society, and for living unapologetically as Lutheran. I will miss him. The church he led is in his debt.

Choices in 2020

I write this in the midst of cascading news about impeachment, primaries, and divisiveness in society. I pray that somehow the church remains a place where the fabric of our public life is cared about, where the divisions that separate us by red and blue, by class and race, may be chipped away by a realization that this society needs to work for everyone...all God's children.

But the above heading is also on my mind as we move toward the completion of the round of six Town Hall meetings (four done, two to go) already involving over 200 people thinking and talking together about life in our part of God's church, and decisions we will make in the coming months. Discussion has been engaged and energetic. Conversation is beginning about what kind of person would serve us best as our next bishop and who some of those possibilities might be. In contrast to the political world where individuals seek power, this is a large-scale call process in which we – the church – seek out ones willing to serve the whole synod. Pray... have conversations... listen to others... think about the church we are to be in the years ahead.

I've been grateful for all with whom I've worked in these first four months of my time with you. There are fine people giving themselves to the life of the church in this place. The future holds promise. Challenge too, of course – this is a challenging time in history to be the church – but we are never without the confidence that comes from knowing the promise of the book of Acts that the Spirit is alive and moving among God's people.



Equipping you remains key to what we do

I hope you all take time to peruse What Matters each week, seeing what is going on that holds promise for better equipping you in your locale to be more effective in ministry. In a number of the Town Hall gatherings I've heard comments in which people say they wish "the synod" would do this and that... and the speaker doesn't realize that we do in fact do many of the this's and that's that they wish for. We all suffer from Communication Overload! So I know I'm asking for one more thing when I say take time to peruse it... but it's something that is in your interest to be doing.

The LEAD event is a good example – an annual gathering with a myriad of workshops all geared at equipping you to take on the ministry that is yours. Register and come March 14!

And reminders...

- Conference Nominating Caucuses happen February 22 – March 8 (eight of the 12 on Sunday, February 23!) Important discussion and decisions in the first step of electing our next bishop.
- LEAD on March 14
- Synod Assembly mailing will be in your hands in the coming days. Register early!
- Continue to pray for the synod, and for the process leading to the election of our next bishop.

As always, thank you for the privilege of serving in your midst!

Grace and Peace,

Peter Rogness
Bishop