

Some Reflections on Our Journey

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

Dear Partners in Ministry,

The not-so-merry Merry Go Round continues, Assembly edition...

I first sat down to write this month's letter intending to observe that the next time I write, presumably early August, we'd be celebrating the election of our next bishop at the completion of a carefully planned and executed 12-site assembly on August 1!

Then this morning the Dane County Health Department issued its latest policy revision, taking back many of the opening-up steps of recent weeks in the light of rapidly rising case numbers for the virus. Though it points out the rapid rise coming primarily from people in their 20's who are gathering with little regard to masks, distancing, and crowd size, the restrictions cover all gatherings. "Religious entities" are to conform to business guidelines calling for less than half capacity, but "meeting...and conferences" are only "permitted with ten (10) individuals or less..." The Order is in effect until further notice.

Obviously, this casts doubt on our ability to hold the events planned for August 1. In the next few days the Executive Committee will convene to consider these developments. After announcing the cancellation of the originally planned June 20 assembly we had determined August 1 as the new date and set August 29 as an alternate date. In these past few week's plans were moving along well . . . until now. August 29 may yet be possible, and while we haven't yet made an official decision about August 1, as I've said, that now looks problematic. We will also explore other meeting models. Stay tuned.

The only thing one can rely on these days is the unpredictability of the times we're in. (That, and the fact that our God can always find ways for the people of God to live as faithful disciples... which you are doing in so many marvelous ways, taxing as it is!)

Bishop Election process is proceeding

On June 29 the second of the recorded forums with the four nominees for bishop was released. I hope all who will be involved in this election are investing the time to watch and discuss with others. This second forum involved each nominee answering each question, and by the end I think it is becoming more possible to have a sense of who each one of these people is and what she might bring to the office.

Link to the forums: <https://scsw-elca.org/2020bishopelection/nominees/#forum1>

You have much to reflect on, and it takes some time to go back and review it all. A 10-12-page biographical information, 5-minute introductory video, now two Q&A forums, and some written responses to follow. Then there will be further speaking and questions at the assembly. All this on top of the thorough work of the Call Committee who set these nominees before the synod. In short, there is much information gathered, and a decision this significant warrants your spending time going deeply into the discernment process.

Weekly Zoom meetings

I had little idea when we first launched the weekly zoom meetings on Tuesday afternoons that there would be this level of interest. Weekly participation has hovered around 50-70 people. This week we moved to Wednesday to accommodate Pastor Everett Mitchell of Madison, pastor of Christ the Solid Rock Baptist Church (Baptists, I've learned, are often more imaginative in naming their churches than we staid Lutherans) and a Dane County judge. Pastor Mitchell knows Wisconsin and knows Lutherans well, and I had asked him to join us for conversation about how we respond to this moment of opportunity to talk about being a Christian body in the midst of heightened conversations about race, justice, and society. If you didn't see it, it was recorded, and you can find it here. <https://scsw-elca.org/healthresources/webinars/>.



Bishop Peter Rogness

July 1, 2020

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He challenged and inspired us, not as an outsider but as a partner in the holy walk of guiding God's people into a deeper discussion of the impact issues of race have on us all. He complimented Lutherans on our willingness to read and study, gathering the tools we need to enter into sometimes uncomfortable conversations... as Jesus did with great regularity! I encourage the continued conversations in our churches.

Our next meeting, next Tuesday, will provide time to reflect on today's conversation, as well as continue to share insights and questions in guiding the life of our congregations in the midst of the pandemic.

It is, after all, summer...

It's usually vacation season. Things are different. But as I've said before, what isn't different is the need for the self-care and renewal that comes from time away. We're now aware that this extended pandemic period takes a toll – pastors are weary, our people are weary, we need to recognize the value of and need for a break. Take it. Pre-record, or direct to a neighbor church for a week or two, use someone else's sermon (I still post a weekly one for that purpose, or swap with a neighbor, familiarizing neighboring congregations with each other's pastor.) Lots of creative possibilities.

You are a marvelous gathering of faithful leaders in this synod. Care for yourselves, and for one another.

Grace and Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter Rogness". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Peter Rogness
Interim Bishop