



## A Pastoral Letter

### Some Reflections on our Journey Together

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

Dear Partners in Ministry,

#### **Assembly**

This letter comes to you in the midst of an increasing flurry of informational pieces regarding the remote assembly we'll be holding in less than three weeks. We have now seen three synods (Western North Dakota, South Carolina, and Southeastern Iowa) hold remote assemblies to elect bishops. It can work. We have learned from those experiences, adopted what we believe are the "best practices" learnings from them, using what appears to be the best in technical resources, so we're confident this can work very well. But it depends largely on the effort made by all who will be voting members to (1) read carefully the instructions, (2) view the training videos that will soon be before you, (3) plan to participate in one of two 25 minute "dry runs" the evening before the assembly – on Friday, August 28, at 6:00 or 6:45... then (4) be sure to log on early on the day of the assembly, Saturday, from 7:30 a.m. on (assembly begins at 8:30, we will replay the Lumi instructional video at 8:15... but we can't handle hundreds logging on in the last few minutes!!

A reminder that the **deadline for registering is this Friday, August 14**. The link for registering is <https://bit.ly/NewSCSWAssembly2020>. (If you need to check who is registered from your congregation, see the endnote<sup>[i]</sup> at the end of this letter.)

#### **Pandemic = Wilderness**

Most of us are well conditioned to living lives of structure, predictable outcomes, familiar patterns, whether in our families, at work, school life, communities, church. We know how things work. And now we find ourselves in a huge upset of those familiar patterns. It's like finding ourselves suddenly wandering in the wilderness instead of strolling down our street.

Our schools are this week making decisions about how to do school. We know how school is supposed to work – Monday through Friday, six hours or so in classes, plus some other activities. But it's not going to be that this fall. Similarly, we know how church works – Sunday morning, classes, bible studies, youth activities, meetings and office activities etc. There was predictability and structure to it. But now it's all wilderness, and very smart and concerned people are thinking and planning hard about how best to go forward. This is new and unexplored territory. We don't know how this is going to work, or even how it's supposed to work.

I'm particularly sensitive to those folks who are to work at home, but now find themselves with kids at home to take care of and to be partially home-schooled as well. How does one make working and parenting work at the same time? I know we have pastors facing these challenges.

If yours is one of the congregations facing this, here's my quick word of counsel: Don't be too quick to rely on structural answers, but lean into grace and pragmatism. How can we all best get through this together? How can we support each other? What are the expectations (hours, availability) that are getting pushed around these days, and how can we figure out how to meet the needs the parish has of its pastor? Pastors are finding out that producing online worship weekly is considerably more work than the regularity of Sunday gatherings. The challenges of fellowship, meetings, classes – These are all more complex in this wilderness than in the simpler days of familiar structure and patterns.

Churches have an advantage: unlike factory assembly lines or 9-5 office operations, we are at our essence *communities*, a set of relationships that connect lives to one another anchored in the grace of a living God. Which means, I think, we can find our way through this wilderness time with grace and flexibility that not every other setting enjoys in the same way.

### **A time of prayer...**

The community of God's people should always be a community of prayer. As we begin to accelerate the information coming to you about the August 29 assembly, I covet your prayers for that gathering – for the four nominees who offer themselves to you for call to the office of bishops, for the gift of discernment and Spirit-guidance for all who will prayerfully issue that call, for all who will have a part in leading this gathering... even for the technology that the church's work may be facilitated smoothly!

When I write next month, you will be on the road into the ministry of a newly elected bishop, and the opening of a new chapter of this synod's life. We pray for the abundant presence of the Spirit.

Thank you for the privilege of being with you on this journey.

Grace and Peace,



Interim Bishop

[1] If you need to see who is registered from your congregation:

- 1) Click on the link to the registration site: <https://bit.ly/NewSCSWAssembly2020>
- 2) Click on the Attendees Tab
- 3) Click on the Congregation Tab – It will alphabetize, and you will be able to find your congregation and associated voting members who are registered