

Subject: Fw: To the Leaders of the Montana Synod

Dear Colleagues in the Montana Synod,

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body."...As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."...If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (I Corinthians 12: 14 ff)

Friends, there are members of the Body of Christ that is the Montana Synod who are suffering. There are people who are deeply hurt by the decisions made at the Churchwide Assembly last week, and there are people who are deeply grateful. There are people who are getting caught between their own convictions and the equally strong convictions of others around them. We need to pray for one another in this time. We need to remember that we are all members of the body of Christ, all beloved by God, and that we need one another no matter how strongly we disagree.

Many of you are aware that even within our staff there is not unanimity of opinion. We represent the diversity that is in the church, and that is intentional. And we intend to continue to work together for the good of the Church. We are committed to maintaining the unity of the Body of Christ. I have always said that there is room in the church, room in this synod for a diversity of opinion on social and political issues. And I have also said that congregations and pastors will not be forced to do something they cannot, in good conscience, do. We have never forced congregations to accept pastors they do not want, nor have we ever forced pastors to serve congregations they were not comfortable with. Nor does the synod or the broader church make policies on weddings in your congregations. And we don't intend to start now.

I urge you, as the leaders of the church in the Montana Synod, to proceed slowly and calmly. Listen to people, all sides. Even when a majority voices one opinion, there will be others who disagree, although they may be less vocal. Try to lower the emotional level, both yours and that of the people you minister with. Getting upset does not help anybody. Remember that Mike Nicholes, our Counselor on call is available on the morning of September 8, to consult by phone with our rostered leaders as we navigate these difficult waters. He is just a phone call away, and while talking with him may not solve the ecclesial and theological issues we face, it can give us the strength and resources to be pastoral leaders in this critical time.

Cling to your baptism, remember your ordination vows, and read your congregation's constitution. Do not speak ill of anyone, and do not use benevolence as a weapon.

Not everyone is aware that an amendment to Resolution 4 of the ministry policy recommendations intentionally made room for people in the church who dissent. This amendment was proposed and adopted as yet another way to say that in this church we do not require unanimity of opinion.

In my email earlier in the week I reminded us that we have a tremendous opportunity to delve more deeply into Scripture at this time. There is more than one Lutheran way to read scripture, and the Book of Faith resources demonstrate this effectively. We hold in common a commitment to Scripture: "The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world." (Montana Synod Constitution S4..02.c)

Throughout the week I have been consulting with the Deans, with lay people and with pastors in our synod, as well as with other Bishops. I have set up conversations in almost all of our clusters in the next 6 weeks. You'll be receiving information about the conversation in your area. In some cases the Deans have recommended special meetings with the clergy, and I am working on setting those up.

Know that you are in my prayers. Please pray for one another, and for the unity of the church.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (I Corinthians 12: 12ff)

In Christ's peace,

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God's work. Our hands.