

Message from Bishop Hoover

August 20, 2009

Dear Co-laborers with Christ,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, meeting in assembly this past week in Minneapolis, found much on which to agree and affirm in our life together. The assembly approved a churchwide initiative to end the worldwide scourge of malaria, voted to join in an initiative to combat HIV/AIDS, and agreed to urge ready access to basic health care for all. The assembly also voted overwhelmingly to enter into a relationship of full communion with the United Methodist Church. However, in debate and action, the assembly also revealed that there are profound divisions within the church over issues of human sexuality and the role of persons living in same-sex relationships in the life and leadership of this church. Specific policies that will implement assembly actions have yet to be developed. While pastors and congregations will retain their freedom to preach, teach and call pastors according to their deeply held convictions, there are those in the church who, in the weeks and months ahead, will be prayerfully discerning how and whether we can continue to minister and witness in our life together.

As we reflect and pray about our divisions, I call upon all of us to also reflect and pray about those foundational truths that bind us together as God's people.

First, we live in a creation - and a church - that is both fallen and redeemed. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Even the life of the church is soiled by human sin that often obscures God's will and impedes the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. By his death we are made whole. This is a holy process that continues in the life of the church. We move into God's future as saints and sinners simultaneously.

Second, none of us ever met anyone for whom Christ did not die. God's grace is a gift freely given to all, effective through faith. The gateway to claiming this gift is through confession of our brokenness before God and repentance of our sin. Thereby, we recognize our need for grace. Before we judge one another, let us look to our own need for grace.

Third, where we are divided, the Holy Spirit fills in the gaps. This is a matter of holy trust. The wind blows where it will and we do not know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with the Spirit. Jesus promised to be with us always, to the close of the age, and sent the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to guide and sustain us. At another time of great controversy in the church, Titus wrote: But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might

become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7).

We do not know where the Spirit is leading us, but together we seek to listen to that guidance. Together, we pray that we may be given grace to bear one another's burdens, to grow in trust in God's presence, and to continually lay our brokenness at the foot of the cross.

Faithfully, your bishop,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "+B. Penrose Hoover". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

+B. Penrose Hoover