



FROM THE BISHOP



Dear Friends,

Early in February I had a lovely four days in the Bear Butte Conference. I had time with my oldest son and was privileged to preach at St. James Lutheran Church in Belle Fourche, and then spent time with the Bear Butte rostered leaders in a winter retreat at Outlaw Ranch. During my time west river I received three gifts.

The first came to me at St. James. I was there just because it worked out, not for an anniversary or installation. The worship was filled with special music, by both young and old. As part of the service the new council members were being installed. At the conclusion of the installation Pastor Jeff Otterman invited me to come down, saying they had a gift to present to me. A young lady went behind the altar and emerged with a gun case in hand. (Now, in the world I come from that is not a scary thing. During my time in Pierre I witnessed the gifting or myself received several firearms as a gift. Because “Nothing says I love you like a shotgun.”)

Excuse me, I digress.

The case was placed in my hands and it was heavy, and so I thought that they really were giving me a firearm. How wrong could I be? As I opened the case, I discovered two cardboard tubes. I tipped the first and out came a wooden shaft that looked like part of a pool cue. The second tube also contained a wooden shaft but this one was different. It had a shepherd’s crook on one end, and now all became clear. Upon fitting the two pieces together, we beheld a beautiful crosier, with the shaft made of white oak and the crook made out of three woods from Cameroon, Africa. Rick Rothermel of Belle Fourche had been commissioned to make the bishop’s staff, and when it came time to make the crook he simply used three of the specialty woods he had in his shop. They are indeed beautiful but they are also another connection to our brothers and sisters in Cameroon. It was a lovely gift, beautifully crafted and playfully presented. I never expected to have a crosier, but when it comes from a community that is the center for wool production in North America, I figure they may know something about sheep and shepherds. I will carry this gift as I work as your bishop as a reminder to me of our connectedness in the South Dakota synod and to the church at large.

The second and third gifts came later that week. During the retreat at Outlaw, Jean Moorehouse presented me with a Star Quilt that had been made by people who attend Woyatan Lutheran Church, located in Rapid City. It was unfolded and draped around my shoulders as is the normal custom in presenting such a gift. As I felt the quilt around me I was reminded of the third gift: The gift of community in Christ. It was so very heartwarming to spend time with colleagues in a relaxing place, sharing the joys and sorrows that come to those who are called to lead in the church.

I encourage each of you to be intentional about making community with one another in your conference gatherings. We are going through difficult times now, and now more than ever we can help one another bear our burdens. If you find your conference to be one where Christian community is a strength, then blessings to you; but if your conference is one in which you feel cut off or isolated then I encourage you to have forthright conversations with one another about how that gift of Christian community might be enhanced.

I look forward to seeing you at Brookings for the Spring Pastor’s Conference.

In Christ’s Love,

Bishop Dave