



South Dakota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Advent into Christmas, 2012

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Consider the story of Jesus and the woman at the well - how prepared Jesus is to adopt a posture of listening. You might think that the Son of God would do all the talking, but the Gospels depict a savior who spends time listening. He listens for the dark fears, the secret hopes, and for that which brings him joy like no other – faith. For those entrusted with the gospel, there will be a time for speaking, but listening comes first.

As I have attempted to listen to you this past year – this is what I believe I've heard:

- 1) I have heard you express a desire to get back to mission after a period of conflict and financial uncertainty. I've heard you say it's time to move on, and I thank God for what I am hearing.
- 2) I have heard our young people tempering their fears about our rapidly changing world with a vibrant faith in Jesus. This summer we had the largest number of young people at the National Youth gathering, and I was blessed to be in worship and conversation with these remarkable folks.
- 3) I have heard our Seminary leadership articulate the rapidly changing face of seminary education. Having heard the needs of the church and of those whom God is calling into ministry our seminaries are adapting to equip people and to deliver education in creative new ways. We are seeing many seminarians embracing distance learning and other means of obtaining a seminary education.
- 4) I sense a movement from God in the new young rostered leaders that have come to our synod these past 5 years. Over 50 newly ordained pastors serve in South Dakota! This next year, I will be looking for ways to listen to them to learn how they see God at work in our church and in our world.

As I look ahead to the coming year, this is what I feel called to encourage you to do:

- 1) Listen to God, each other and your community. We've provided a set of tools in the “missional tool box” on our website. These tools are for listening to what God is telling us to do and be. Please use these tools for mission planning, and then bring your plan to be celebrated and this year's Synod Assembly.
- 2) Listen to the young people in your community. In our new Synod Strategy we see engagement with youth as a key asset that we want to build on for the future. I encourage you to tune your ears to the young people in your community for they bring a perspective from which old-timers like me can learn.
- 3) Listen to the “sojourner” in your midst. God's word reveals that God has a heart for those who walk among us “strangers in the land.” Our state is blessed with a growing population of immigrant people. These brothers and sisters of ours know things about how the world works (or doesn't work), and they have witnessed some amazing ways that God works. Their perspective will both convict and inspire us.

Thank you for your generosity and your faithfulness in God's mission. Thanks for listening and speaking the good news of Jesus Christ. Faith comes from what is heard, but once it comes it is a mighty force for God's mission. It is a joy to share this “busy, active, vital” faith with you my co-workers in the Gospel of the South Dakota Synod.

God's Blessings,

The Rev. David B. Zellmer
Bishop of the South Dakota Synod, ELCA