



Dear Friends in Christ,

We live in challenging times. Of course, the world has never been a safe and peaceful place. We live in a world that is in rebellion against God. And we are the agents of God's grace in this hurting and dangerous world.

Our mission festival speaker from Pakistan certainly challenged us to look at the world in new ways. Based on what I learned, I no longer believe that Muslims are worshipping the same God we Christians worship. I have come to believe that the god of Islam is a false god who leads people away from the truth.

However, I did disagree with parts of our speaker's presentation. Some of his claims about the book of Revelation are just plain wrong. Also I don't believe Christians should be fearful of Muslim immigration. I think Christians should view Muslim immigration as God's way of bringing the mission field to our front door. It is terribly hard to reach Muslims inside Muslim nations. So God is bringing them to us. The question is: are we called to faith or fear in our relationship with our Muslim neighbors? Do we trust the gospel of Jesus for our Muslim neighbors too?

Peace Lutheran Church has a history of being committed to God's mission around the world. Last year we were recognized as one of the leading congregations in support for the ELCA World Hunger Appeal. For several years now, almost 50 members of Peace have been giving \$10 per month to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal through an automatic electronic funds transfer program provided by Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.

Because Thrivent is going to begin charging for that program, we are going to drop out as a congregation at the end of this year. That means that all electronic funds transfers for ELCA World Hunger Appeal will stop after December 31. But I hope our passion for the hungry and the poor will continue. I hope that we can

continue to find a way to raise \$500 each month for hunger relief work.

At the same time, we are considering changes in the way we engage in mission beyond our congregation. Up until now, we have simply sent our mission support offerings to the Nebraska Synod of the ELCA. The Nebraska Synod and the ELCA have decided how to spend those resources.

For some time now there has been concern that the ELCA may not be the best steward of our mission offerings. That concern has increased since the latest ELCA Assembly. Some ELCA congregations have seen their offerings decrease because members cannot support the way the ELCA is going about mission. Some of our members have requested that we find a new way to support God's mission around the world.

Congregations that have switched to focused giving of mission offerings to particular mission causes are finding that their commitment to mission work is growing. People get excited about giving to mission when they can clearly see what their gifts are doing. Perhaps the days of denominational control of mission work are coming to an end.

This month we will have two congregational meetings. On November 15 we will welcome our bishop to visit with us about our concerns and questions about the ELCA. Bishop deFreese will try to encourage us to stay in the ELCA and to continue to support God's mission through the ELCA. He believes that disagreements about what God's Word says about the purpose of sexuality should not be allowed to divide us. He believes that staying with the ELCA is the best way for us to support God's mission in the world.

On November 22 we will meet to elect officers for our congregation and to consider a recommendation from the church council about how best to use our mission offerings. Since August we have withheld the last \$13,750 of our 2009 budget for mission share until the congregation has a chance to decide how best to steward those gifts - whether through general ELCA mission share or through focused giving to particular mission causes recommended by the church council.

The world keeps changing. God's Spirit keeps moving and working. As Christians we can never get too comfortable with the way things are. The only question is whether we will respond with fear or with faith. I am praying for faith to see what God's Spirit is up to.

Yours in Christ, *Phil Nielsen*