



Dear Friends in Christ,

January is the time for the annual meeting of Peace Lutheran Church. Our annual meeting is an opportunity to reflect on and discuss where we have been and where we are going as a congregation. It is an opportunity to evaluate our health as a congregation and to consider new ideas. It is an opportunity to focus on what things are really important as we go about our day to day life as a congregation.

This year's meeting will be particularly challenging. Recent developments in our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America regarding sexuality and the interpretation of Scripture have caused some of our members to question our identity as an ELCA congregation. Over the past four months we have been trying to learn about the issues and listen to one another. Bishop deFreese shared his perspective on how to face the issues that divide. Pastor Doyle Karst shared his experience as part of Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ. A team of members met several times and helped develop a proposal which was approved by the church council. Now it is time for us to talk together and decide how Peace Lutheran Church will proceed.

The proposed resolution calls for Peace Lutheran Church to join LCMC and leave the ELCA. It also calls for us to delay our final

ratifying vote to leave the ELCA until 2011 to give time for all our members to fully evaluate what we are doing. If the resolution receives a two-thirds majority vote, Peace could move forward in the next year as an LCMC congregation while remaining officially connected to the ELCA.

Some will be impatient with this process, but we owe it to our members and friends who disagree with this resolution to take as much time as possible to finalize our decisions. This is not about trying to make a statement. This is about trying to be faithful to who we are as a community in Christ. There is simply no reason to rush this decision. I hope that all our members will be patient as we work together on these difficult issues.

We will have two important congregational meetings this month. First, on January 10, we will meet over soup and sandwiches to discuss the resolution recommended by the church council. There will be opportunity to listen, discuss, and share our perspectives on the resolution. No votes will be taken. We will just try to better understand one another. Second, on January 24, we will meet in our annual meeting to discuss and decide several issues including the resolution concerning our affiliation with the ELCA and LCMC.

Bishop deFreese is absolutely right that for Christians how we make controversial decisions is just as important if not more important than what we decide. Recent news reports have described angry and bitter conflicts at congregational meetings in some ELCA congregations. If we end up fighting about these issues, it probably means we are not ready to decide anything.

As we prepare for these meetings, I urge you to keep several important things in mind.

1. It is more important for us to learn about and understand the opinions of those who

disagree with us than for us to make others understand our opinions. If we all worked as hard at understanding one another as we do at making ourselves understood, then there would be no church fights.

2. It is important that everyone have an opportunity to have their views heard and understood. No one should leave the meeting feeling that their point of view was not heard. If you are afraid to speak up at the meetings, please visit with me or with someone else you trust to ask them to express your views.

3. Speak for yourself (unless asked to speak for someone else). In other words, don't try to hide behind unnamed others. Share what you believe and not what others believe. Let others speak for themselves.

4. Always remember that just because someone disagrees with you it does not mean that they have not been listening to your point of view. There are good reasons for both sides in this disagreement. Each side wants good things for the Church. We can hear and understand one another and still respectfully disagree about what is best for the Church.

5. This is not a crisis that will destroy the Church. No matter what we decide as a congregation, God will continue working for the sake of Christ's mission to save the world. The Church of Christ will survive and perhaps even grow through the challenges we are facing.

6. It is never ever appropriate to question the faith and sincerity of those in the Church who disagree with us. How gracious we are in disagreement is more important than what decisions we reach.

7. If you think these will be easy decisions for the Church, you have not done a good job of listening to the other side. Whatever we decide, some people on both sides of the debate will feel pain. We need to attend to that pain with compassion for one another.

8. God uses controversy and disagreement to teach us how to love one another. It is easy to love those with whom we agree. We are called to love those with whom we disagree.

I look forward to our congregational meetings this month because I trust that whatever we decide as a congregation, if we do it with grace and faith, God will move us forward. I have definite opinions about the issues we face, but I also know that I could be wrong. I don't know everything. I am always eager to hear the thoughts, feelings, and convictions of others. I don't want to argue or fight. I want to listen, consider, and understand. I hope you all have the same attitudes and hopes of working this out together.

Yours in Christ, *Phil Nielsen*

## **WEEKEND WORSHIP**

### **SCHEDULE**

#### **JANUARY 10 - Baptism of Our Lord**

Sermon "*Baptized in the Spirit*"  
(*Luke 3*)

#### **JANUARY 17 - Epiphany 2**

Sermon "*Gifts of the Spirit*"  
(*1 Corinthians 12*)  
Holy Communion  
Peace Choir Sings

#### **JANUARY 24 - Epiphany 3**

Sermon "*Diversity and Unity*"  
(*1 Corinthians 12*)  
Praise Choir Sings

#### **JANUARY 31 - Epiphany 4**

Sermon "*Learning to Love*"  
(*1 Corinthians 13*)  
Holy Communion