

October 2016

Beloved Children of God,

I write this message to you as I prepare to go into retreat with the rest of my fellow rostered leaders of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod. We will be having our annual Fall Theological Conference – and my first with this synod – at Mount Carmel Ministries and Luther Crest Bible Camp located in Alexandria, MN. This year's theme is 'Equipping Disciples for God's Ongoing Reformation' as we prepare for the observance of the Protestant Reformation that began nearly 500 years ago.

Some of the topics we will be in conversation about concern how the Reformation's legacy has led to reconciliation in our congregational lives, and possibly throughout our public lives today. We seek to explore how some of Martin Luther's then radical ideas might apply to our callings in an anxious and sometimes polarized world; each day we unfortunately see on the television or listen to the radio about the deterioration of race relations in our country, and now even closer to home. Last week we heard of stabbings in the St. Cloud area and how an already divided community is again threatened because of the actions of one individual. But what you probably did not see or hear about was the local Somali leaders denouncing what occurred in the name of their faith. Ecumenical faith leaders – Christian and Muslim – came together in prayer to work towards a better understanding of our different cultures and offer ideas to work together for years to come.

But we still lament the pain and the losses of what continues in our local areas, and throughout our sinful world. In the middle of these dark places where it seems Christ has left us, we must remember that we indeed find Christ there. These are the holy places where people come together – neighbors one and all – joining together in reconciliation and mindfulness of our surroundings. I trust that God continues to redeem these moments and helps our local communities in mutual understanding and awareness that all comes from God, and we are to share in the abundance of Creation. The Gospel, through a resurrected Christ, calls us to love all of our neighbors – even the ones who look different than us, love different than us, and share a faith different than us.

I leave this prayer for you to meditate on and consider in your own lives. Pray this with family and friend, by yourself, or place it for all to see. Let us be the love that God calls us to be.

*O God, where hearts are fearful and constricted, grant courage and hope.
Where anxiety is infectious and widening, grant peace and reassurance.
Where impossibilities close every door and window, grant imagination and resistance. Where
distrust twists our thinking, grant healing and illumination.
Where spirits are daunted and weakened, grant soaring wings and
strengthened dreams. All these things we ask in the name of
Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

In His sake,

Rev. Erik R. Karlson
Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish