

## Neighbors in Christ,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This month I would like to provide you with a synopsis of the recent Southwestern Minnesota Synod Fall Theological Conference I attended in October. The theme of this year's get together was *Boldly Living Together in Christ's Mission*. It stressed our theological and rostered leaders to further themselves, but also our congregations to continue moving ahead in asking the question, "What is God doing in our lives and in our faith communities?"

As Christians, we called to serve in God's world, engage leaders, and have our congregations equipped to do these things we are called to do. Now for some of us, we may have fallen into the place of complacency where we feel we are doing "ok" and we do not need to adapt going forward. But a few days ago I drove by Clear Lake Lutheran Church and said to myself, "That's not going to happen on my watch." Churches are closing south and west of where our three-point parish is located. We cannot fall into survival mode, rather we need to be in revival mode. And we may need to ask for help in keeping us from doing so. Asking for help is what we do as followers of Christ. We not only need God, but we need one another.

Our loving God can help us through the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is essential to be reminded to trust the Good News through the life, death and resurrection of Christ; share God's story with others in our communities; invite others and worship around the Word and sacraments we know where God's loving promises come from; pray and consistently thank the Lord for the gifts given us; focus on God's grace to help transform and adapt for what is to come in the future (whatever that may be); be faithful stewards to invite, encourage, and generously support one another; remember that we are a broken people who need forgiveness; and be confident that our loving God can assist us in the time and talents that we have been given from above. This sounds like a large list, but some of us are already doing this – but for others, this may be a place to reevaluate who and where we are in life and take up our own cross and follow Jesus. Again, what is God doing in your life? Think deeply on this.

For our lay leaders...as this goes for all of us...we are to promote a spirit of collegiality among one another. Don't be the first person to head out the door before the last hymn finishes. Stay. Enjoy others, and share what is going on in your life. We are also encouraged to assist others in the gifts that they can share with the rest of the congregations and parish. You may never know about these gifts until you ask someone, and you may be surprised in what you hear that can help friend, neighbor, and congregant. Connect with your leadership, and pastor, with fruitful ideas in conversations such as "why we do it the way we do it?" Just because it has been done for decades, doesn't necessarily make it the same today as it was yesterday.

Tradition may be a stumbling block for others and that could be a reason they are not in the pews. Help foster positive relationships and work through unhealthy connections if you do see, feel, or hear something that is different for you. My door is open on Monday afternoons, I am available to meet with you by appointment, and I can of course be called on the phone. And this is especially important: leadership is here to facilitate

reconciliation in a variety of relationships, especially in our congregations, throughout the parish, and in our local communities.

These themes I have written on this month, in my opinion, will help us flourish as congregations, but more importantly as a parish...and in and among ourselves. I encourage you to take this to heart and look into yourselves as Christians. And I look forward to seeing you in worship. Bless you all.

In HIS name,

Rev. Erik Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish