

Summer 2019 President's Letter One Year Observation

"Well, Pastor Buss, tell me, what are your observations after being in the district president's office for a year?" So asked the young lay leader of one of our congregations on a recent visit. It was nice to be asked, and I had been thinking about what I have learned and observed over the past year. One of my mentors told me that it is not just about how much experience you have, but your evaluated experience.

This all fits then.

I have been impressed at the desire of our congregations to be biblically grounded and Christ proclaiming. We are not about replacement of the Word of God with a social justice message. Neither tradition nor feel good replace the Word of God. That Word is present and powerful in Word and Sacrament. Your sister congregations are proclaiming the crucified and risen Christ! We love the truth, proclaim the truth, and taught by our Savior, we love the people around us, even people we disagree with. We are Joy:fully Lutheran!

It has been a joy to have visited over 40 of our congregations over the weekends, 90 plus if you add in weekday visits. While we have diversity in location, demographics, ethnicity, etc., there has been a beautiful spirit of hospitality and interest in our life together in the NID. In fact, on most of the weekend visits my wife, Marie, has accompanied me. We have been learning together. At a recent installation service in the western part of our district, someone asked, "Where is Marie?" Unfortunately, I had to tell the individual she could not make it. For those congregations large and small, urban and rural, who have invited me, I thank you. It remains a joy and delight.

I began this journey with the words, "We are in this together." There are so many places where our partnerships in the NID are lessening pain and adding joy (Romans 12:15). One of our suburban congregations is currently working on assisting an urban congregation with the desire that their almost empty facilities will again be vibrant with Christian ministry. This is not a takeover, but building on the past and looking forward, expecting that God will grant His blessing and kingdom growth. The Lord has the best perspective and He gives us glimpses.

At a recent meeting of pastors who are concerned with trends in their congregations, we were all reminded that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). I shared one of my favorite Scriptures over the years, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it and God made it grow, so neither he who plants or he who waters is anything, but God who makes things grow (1 Corinthians 3:6,7). Someone said to me, "You are preaching to the choir." My heartfelt response remains, "This member of the choir [me] needs the reminder often." Daily, in fact! My experience this past year has been that many of our congregations, workers, and laity need to be reminded! For those who have brought me the Gospel and been sent by God to tell me that

this work is not in vain, I thank you (1 Corinthians 15:58). Much of the work over the past year has been of encouragement, perspective, and some challenge.

There are so many things we cannot control. We grieve at things that used to be. Many of our congregations are in decline in attendance and giving. Many congregations are missing the youth and young adults they would long to share the Word of God with. What does the future hold for our congregations? What will the church look like? I love this quote, given to me by retiring First Vice President of the LCMS Dr. Herbert Mueller: "We do not fight for victory, we fight from victory." Because of Jesus Christ, we are a community of hope, joy, and victory! We are on the winning side. Be courageous, Jesus has you and has covered you with His righteousness! In Christ, we are together and stronger (1 Corinthians 12).

This has been a year of learning, humility, and stretching, sometimes with experiences way beyond my comfort zone. In fact, as I begin my second year, I want to learn, especially as Jesus teaches me from His Word, suffering, and my sisters and brothers. The unique part of the year has been listening and learning from you. And, we will be unveiling a path forward based on our visioning process this past spring.

Recently, I received a correspondence from Carol Laesch, widow of Ted Laesch, NID president from 1985 to 1997. President Laesch was my first district president. Referring to her husband, she said that he always viewed himself as a pastor, not a president or a bureaucrat. To that I say, "Amen!"

Thank you for your support for our life and work together. You are valued.

Blessings,

Rev. Dr. Allan R. Buss
District President