

Fall 2019 President's Letter

Be A Good Listener

"Be a good listener." That is what I especially remember my wife, Marie, saying to our four children when they were young. In fact, I think over our thirty-plus years of marriage she may have said that to me a few times.

The Northern Illinois District is finishing a vision clarity process with the ministry arm of Lutheran Church Extension Fund. In the seven gatherings we held, I did a great deal of listening. We did a great deal of listening. Listening is what we do as the people of God.

We find clarity and vision when we listen to the Word of God. "Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance" (Proverbs 1:5). We are a people of the Word and that Word is like Jesus, "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). At the Transfiguration of Jesus, God the Father speaks from Heaven to the Disciples, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him" (Matthew 17:5).

All this seems so basic to us although we see denominations and churches who have diminished the Word and its power with either feelings or tradition. Just yesterday I met a young man who has joined one of our congregations. He said, "My family and I needed more than 'fluff' and a constant nagging to have 'God-sized dreams.'" They longed for Bible-based, Christ-centered, sacrament-rich worship and spiritual life.

I can tell you that during the vision gatherings the Word of God and our Lutheran teachings undergirded the discussions. That type of unity is a blessing. We are the Church formed and guided by the Word of God, Law and Gospel with a rich Christology. One of our Lutheran Church Fathers said, "There is a perpetual union between the Word of God and the Spirit of God."

We find vision and clarity as we listen to each other. We have talented and passionate people in our congregations. They have thoughts, concerns, and Spirit-led ideas. We had amazing discussions and engagement between diverse people from all kinds of congregations!

As we consider the future of the NID through the task force called for at the 2018 district convention we have had interesting discussions. Things will be different in congregations, schools, districts, and even in the LCMS in the future. That can be intimidating, but it can also be an adventure that we are in together. But after a discussion, one of our lay-leaders said, "We can talk about what we can't do, but I am here to talk about what we can do!" What a humbling moment for all in the room!

It seems many of our politicians are more interested in talking at each other or about each other rather than to each other. That seems to find its way into the church also. We have seen it... and we must confess we have done it. It is sinful and unhelpful. Christ makes His people, His people. We have a high and holy calling, and the righteousness of Christ covers this as well. We need to commit ourselves to more positive and up-building conversations at all levels of church life.

Recently, a pastor friend of mine asked me, "How's your job?" But then he adjusted his question, "I mean, better said, and how is your Calling?" I have a Calling in Christ and so do you. We have a Calling in our Savior and we have a "calling" toward each other in

His Church. We listen to each other, to understand, grow, find discernment, and to bless each other. Proverbs says, "The wise walk with the wise and become wiser still" (Proverbs 9:9).

We listen to the voices in our community. What do you mean by that? I mean that we listen to the cries of pain, anger, hurt, struggles, and emptiness. The world is lost, I get that! We see the departure of our country further and further away from Christ, truth, and the Church. Our agenda is not set by the world. But we watch how Jesus listened with ears and eyes.

"When he saw the crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:6). He knew what the people without Him were talking about, struggling with sin or how it had torn their lives. He knew them and their questions. Jesus' life and mission was very practical and yet profound.

The world that Jesus came to did not know what or who they needed, but He did! The world to which we have been called does not know what it really needs or who it needs but we do. We engage by asking questions and listening... and then we get to speak!

So thank you for reading this. Thank you for listening! I can't help but think of the Word of God from James: "don't merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:19). Jesus listened to the Father perfectly for you! He is listening to our prayers too! Now the NID gets to listen as well!