

What to Do When You Go Home

Closing of the Lutheran CORE Convocation

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We're coming to the end of this first Convocation. Lots of us have come together around the challenges of our Lutheran future together.

In this many people, there are lots of expectations and issues gathered in these hours. I'm sure we haven't satisfied them all. The ground has shifted; it's still shaking.

What do we do now — and next? That is the real question before us as we prepare to go our separate ways today. What *can* we do about our future — together and in our separate places of being Lutheran Christians now?

What happened at Churchwide has changed a lot. There's no going back, that is clear. What the next weeks and months ahead bring we *do* not know, we *cannot* know with much clarity yet. There's still too much dust in the air, too much grief and pain we're still experiencing. It's just beginning.

Some of us will be leaving the ELCA, sooner or later. Some of us don't know what we will be doing, even if we stay — even for awhile. What shall we do?

First and most importantly, let's live in forgiveness and hope, not because we know what's next, but because we know Who will be with us. Jesus Christ wants our future more than we do. He has a mission; we must do it together.

But we cannot do it, wrapped in anger or pain. ***Resentment is the only poison we take ourselves, thinking we are hurting someone else.*** The remedy and solution is forgiveness. We can't change what has happened, but we can set it free in forgiveness. In the power of Jesus victory and forgiveness, we can forgive.

Not because most of the people we need to forgive deserve it or even want it. We forgive anyway. It is because we must be free to live and plan and move forward, poison free.

It means we will need to appropriate the mercy of Jesus tomorrow, as well as we do today. We can move on, even in our tears and our pain. We must live in forgiveness, and forgiveness is something we will need to do again and again for quite awhile.

There is a future for us, a future together that we only glimpse right now. Things will happen that will make it possible for us to do this, things that aren't clear right now, but Jesus is in clear view.

So, I'm going home to live in forgiveness. Will you, too? And here's what we can do. We can pray and stick together and work on this future as best we can.

We can focus on the call of Jesus. It's still ours and more important than ever to do. I intend to connect and support other pastors and lay persons in the days ahead. My phone and internet will call me to listen and counsel and point struggling people to Jesus and to His future for us and to work things out the best we can.

Little things we need to do right away, need to be done. Read your congregation constitutions. That's a first, if you haven't yet. What are your options? What have your constitutions obligated you to do . . . and not do?

Do some careful work on the decision about what you're going to do with your benevolence dollars. Whatever you do with your money, don't keep it! Whatever you decide, keep it focused outward. Don't spend benevolences on heat and lights. It will eat you alive.

Find out where your people are, not just the ones who are noisy on either end. Schedule some conversation times. What will serve your people and your mission? Think about that. If your congregation is deeply divided, that's different than those of us who will probably have an 80-90% vote to leave.

Start gathering reading materials, website information, ways to help your people get connected to what's happening. Some of us have been drowning in this for months. Most haven't even started.

Make sure what you provide is useful, positive, and not just anti-ELCA stuff. Assume that many of your people are internet connected. They are. So point them to good and helpful resources.

Get going; movement is needed. Find out what your options are right now. Don't wait. Your friends are counting on you to make good decisions right away.

Get short-term goals and do them right away.

And don't be alone. Call someone; let others call on you. The devil is planning to wait — on our anger, our despair and our inaction.

Talk with your people, people in your congregations. Listen to them and help them know you're working on this already. Especially for those most angry or embarrassed by the ELCA, they need to sense something is happening. Let them sense your hope and zeal.

Some of us are going to be moving to leave fairly soon, but it needs to be done carefully and with the mission of Jesus in view. There is no rush to make a decision, but there *is* a rush to get people connected to the issues. I am not interested in telling Chicago anything.

Who nearby is with you? Reach out and find out right away. I'm thinking especially of smaller congregations and their pastors who may be at greatest risk and need right now. Some of us can help; all of us must try and do so immediately.

Gather with people near you, to talk and pray and seek both information and possibilities. Possibilities are there and there will be more, I am sure of that. Don't expect lots of solutions and clear answers. There's lots of careful, prayerful work to be done.

It's going to be tricky, I know. But there is a part of this that is terribly exciting, too, don't you think? We've spent all our ELCA years and before, struggling and working against what has now happened. It's over; it's done. We don't have to spend ourselves there anymore. Let's quit sending and reading anti-ELCA e-mail. Let's use that time to read the Bible.

Let's take that energy, that passion, and transfer it to a future that we don't have clearly, but a future that surely is better than what we've been messing with.

And let's be gracious and kind, known for our positive spirit and hope. Let not resentment be the poison that we drink. Let's be known for what we believe, not for what we're against anymore. Let's be faithful to the Gospel, the Word of God, and the Lord Jesus.

What has happened, Jesus saw coming. He was not surprised, no matter how people interpret a tornado and a broken cross. We are not alone. Just look around you and think of the hundreds, thousands who weren't able to join us for these hours,

people who, with us, care and want what's coming.

There are no more messages to be sent to Chicago or to anyone in particular. We are not defeated, just forever changed and sent to what we know is both true and essential. We can move with clarity and vision even if we don't know the destination because Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever. Now we can spend ourselves much more specifically and directly for what matters, what lasts, what we know to be true.

Let us stand together, as we see the future of Lutheranism change for the good. It's worth it; Jesus calls us to do it. He is not defeated or set aside by any decision or action. We have the opportunity to make an eternal difference.

Will we? I believe we will. I'm going home excited, though I don't know what's coming. I trust Jesus; I trust you; I trust *us* more than I've ever trusted Lutherans before.

God has given us this new freedom and opportunity. Let us rise in hope and forgiveness to put aside the past and find the future we have been called to for *Jesus'* sake and for the sake of those He loves and wants.

This is about Lutheran orthodoxy and Confessions, and it is about God's Word. And it's about mission to people without Jesus. Both point us, call us to be together. I'm ready. I believe you are too. Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Let us sing together:

*God's Word is our great heritage
And shall be ours forever.
To spread its light from age to age
Shall be our chief endeavor.
Through life it guides our way;
In death it is our stay.
Lord, grant while time shall last
Your Church may hold it fast
Throughout all generations.*