



September 3, 2018

Dear Brothers in Christ,

³I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil.1:3-6)

Brothers, I thank God for each of you, especially for your faith in Jesus and for the partnership that we share in the Gospel. I count it a joy to call you brothers in Christ, and I look forward to our ministry together here in the MN South District of our beloved Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

I also thank God for the faith and work of outgoing President Dean Nadasdy. Much of his tireless work and care for our district and her workers has allowed me to inherit a treasure of opportunity to continue in what he has begun. He is a blessing to me and this district, and I hope to take up his challenge to lead our district with “the two great strengths of our robust Lutheran faith: our confession and evangelism.”

This week I officially begin my fulltime service as District President. Many of you may be wondering, “Who is this guy?” “What’s he going to do?” And “How will he serve?” As I noted in my convention address, “my approach will be to love the Lord, love people, and love our Lutheran theology, in that order. Where differences may remain among us, I hope to bring more light and less heat, and be a voice of principled reason that speaks not just with conviction, but with compassion and understanding, as together we live out what it means to be a 21st century confessional Lutheran church that ‘desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth’ (1 Tim. 2:4).”

My hope, therefore, is to serve pastorally caring for you (and your families), and when possible do so in a similar manner to the care I give in the parish, while at the same time encouraging you to care for the lost and found souls of our MN South District. This pastoral letter aims to express the beginning of that care. It is the first of many by which I intend to extend my personal pastoral care to you.

Yet, at the same time I’ve been given ecclesiastical responsibilities with this position. There is, I realize, a need for good order and supervision within our District and Synod. However, my hope is not to let that alone dictate how I serve you. Rather than acting by the power of the ecclesiastical structure of our synod and district alone, I hope to go about serving you and your congregations pastorally on the basis of the authority given by Christ through the Office of the Holy Ministry.

It is a bit of a balancing act, I realize. One must note where the responsibilities of our humanly designed ecclesiastical structure begins and ends, while simultaneously carrying out the care of souls through the divinely established Office of Ministry.

Truth be told, all pastors face this balancing act. On the one hand, you could certainly act out of the power of your position based upon your standing in the congregation and community, perhaps acting like a boss, coercing or demanding that board decisions and council actions about congregational organizational matters go your way. On the other, you can act and serve out of the authority given to you by our Lord Jesus through the Office of the Holy Ministry (Matt. 28:18-20; Jn. 20:20-23).

As Lutherans, we recognize Christ did not establish his church to be run by a boss. Christ came as the suffering servant, enduring torment and death not so He could be the boss, but so that He could serve and offer His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. As such, He instituted the Office of the Ministry to operate in the same way. Boss language brings the Church into the kingdom of the left hand, which opens up cracks for the entrance of what can be unhelpful left-hand practices for a right-hand kingdom. One of my seminary professors put it this way: “Ways of the kingdom of the left hand imported to the kingdom of the right-hand work destructively, even though they may appear very successful by the criteria of the kingdom of the left hand.” (Norman Nagel).

The danger comes in when we let the allure of power (the left hand kingdom) be our guiding principle rather than the authority of Christ and His Word. You see, power is a limited commodity. You can obtain and wield power only by taking it away from others. This is the principle at work in business, politics, government, and yes, even in the church. Whenever we use power to get our way, we have to struggle to get it and fight to keep it. As DOXOLOGY lecturer and Professor John Kleinig, teaches, “we must dis-empower someone else and gain control of that power” so we can use it to coerce and force our will upon others be it for good or ill.

But such is not the way of Christ. Pastors are called to serve from the authority of Christ (right hand kingdom) and not from human power (left hand kingdom). Of course, inherent left hand realities do press upon a congregation and pastor, and certainly a District President (i.e. organizational structures, constitutions, governing boards, voter’s meetings, etc.). The continual temptation for all of us is to use and abuse people through power instead of serving, loving, and leading them through the authority of Christ.

While human power is a limited commodity, divinely given authority is always infinite. As a called and ordained servant of the Word, the more you exercise Christ’s authority among the lost and found (in preaching and sacramental administration) for the forgiveness of sins, the more authority you have. In a real sense, the more you give away, the more authority you gain. We pastors have nothing to give to others that we have not received for ourselves. We forgive because we have been forgiven. We love because Christ first loved us.

Our abiding joy as pastors is that we have been called to love the lost and found in our congregations and communities, knowing we are authorized by Christ Himself to serve them publicly with the gifts of life and salvation through Word and Sacrament.

Thus, please know I look to balance and navigate the power of my elected office as District President with my authority to serve you in the name and stead of Christ, praying that I may always let Christ and His authority lead the way. To that end, I ask for your prayers. I am learning much and ask for your patience and the Lord’s providing, not only for this position, but also to honor my first vocation as husband/father, just as I expect and pray you are also doing. (I will say more on that another time.)

As I look ahead to the next three years, I rejoice in our partnership in the Gospel and pray the Lord Jesus sends His Holy Spirit upon you to comfort you and lead you in the joy of proclaiming the kingdom of God. Now may **“God supply every need of yours according to his riches in the glory of Jesus Christ. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen”** (Phil. 4:19-20).

Your brother in Christ,



Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford