

September 17, 2009

TO: Commissioners, Youth Advisory Delegates, Corresponding Members and Friends of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies

FROM: Phil Brown  
Synod Executive

SUBJECT: The Meeting of the Synod Assembly  
September 27 - 29, 2009

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Could it be that we're just so familiar with this passage of scripture, it may be for us nothing more than a lovely sounding wet noodle. ...

***There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;  
Varieties of services, but the same Lord;  
Varieties of activities,  
but the same God who activates all of them in everyone ...  
To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.***  
(I Corinthians 11: 4-7)

During the years I served the Presbytery of Milwaukee, the theme of the Corinthian passage surfaced for me as a clear rallying call for our minister members and elders. More clearly or evident than the previous presbytery I'd served was the "variety" of those present and serving among us. The difference was the "variety" was not perceived to be of the "same Spirit" and certainly not living and ministering together for a "common good."

The change in my perspective may have been affected as much by changing times as changing locations. Working for the unity of the church, demonstrating to our communities locally and globally that there is something extraordinarily unique about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ appears to me increasingly elusive for us. Instead, the behaviors and attitudes we exhibit; the labels we so readily cast on others from the pews, from our session meetings – at all levels of the church – don't seem very different than what we see and hear in our communities, our schools and politics. Who's reflecting whom? Who's reflecting Jesus Christ?

***A LABEL is a MASK life wears.  
We put labels on life all the time. "Right," "wrong," "success,"  
"failure," "lucky," "unlucky," may be as limiting a way of seeing things  
as "diabetic," "epileptic," "manic-depressive," or even "invalid."  
Labeling sets up an expectation of life that is often so compelling  
we can no longer see things the way they really are.  
This expectation often gives us a false sense of familiarity  
toward something that is really new and unprecedented.  
We are in relationship with our expectations and not with life itself.***  
(Kitchen Table Wisdom, Remen, p. 66)

At the national arenas of government we can almost recoil from the heat of discussions around health care reform; the labels applied when a president wants to address young

people; the vindictiveness asserted towards those with whom we disagree is rampant. An interesting word showed up in a recent editorial entitled “Time to stand up for being reasonable.” The word is “bloviator,” an individual prone to carry on too long (I know what you’re thinking.) – a “pompous and boastful orator.” The writer, confessing that we’ve all been guilty at one time or another of bloviating contrasts that sin with the current reality he calls “attack, attack, attack” the individual or group with whom we disagree.

***It is science that addresses totally different questions than religion:  
Science explains the world, God is behind the world;  
Science explains what is, religion offers a sense of what ought to be;  
Science tells us how the world acts, religion tells us how we should act.***  
(*The Hand of God*, Begley, p. 10)

My purpose in all this is to challenge ourselves, those of us who claim Jesus Christ at the center of our lives and faith communities –

- ***to call a halt to our own behaviors*** that in any way impose a label on others – that challenge the integrity and motives of others – demean their person rather than engage the substance of issues under consideration, and then, only when we seek the common good rather than only to reinforce our own position and tear down the other.
- ***to strongly invite others within our faith communities to cease and desist*** when we encounter one another in our church life using these unfaithful behaviors. Why would anyone want to become a member of our congregations when we exhibit or allow others to exhibit such toxic attitudes and behaviors? They are not activities God is activating.
- ***Together, as the people of Christ, let us challenge our public leaders to cease behaviors that simply vilify, tear down, destroy persons who are of a different opinion than our own.*** Even a plea for civility would be a vast improvement, not to mention faithfulness to the One we call Lord. Many of our public leaders will claim some form of faith practice in their lives, none of which, I would risk, would urge disciples to relate to others in a destructive fashion.

You can believe there’s more on this subject to come. Yes, I am prone to bloviating. In the meantime, I do urge you to take up the challenge to confront our own stinging talk and behaviors within the church and that of others who represent us in various arenas of our towns, states and the country. Who knows, it may be that some folks in our communities find it an enticing reason to join our churches because we refuse to act like everyone else in the way we treat differences.

### ***Regarding the meeting and this mailing...***

- This is the second mailing in preparation for the fall meeting of the synod, 2009. Details about time and location were included in the first mailing.
- The **Minutes** of the spring meeting of the synod were sent by email to all of you for whom we have an address. A hard copy will be made available at the synod

meeting, along with the Stated Clerk's report and the August Financial Statement.

**A frequent and important reminder:** please inform us on a timely basis regarding your attendance and your travel schedule. The **RSVP** is very important for making accommodations available and meals reserved. No-shows are costly for per capita dollars. If you will arrive late on Sunday evening, please let Mary know. She can either hold the meal for your arrival or suggest you eat along the way. If you will be arriving past 8 in the evening, please eat along the way. What is **important** is for you to **keep Mary informed** of your schedule (952-237-9096), so we know where you are. For your advanced information, the **Nominating Task Force of the Synod** (to nominate the new moderator and vice moderator for 2010) will request the Assembly to suspend the by-laws (Article II Section II) in order to install the newly elected officers during the closing worship service of the fall meeting, to become effective when the winter (Annual) meeting convenes. Normally, the officers are not installed until a worship service half way through the first meeting of the year, for which the outgoing officers have to be present and active until the installation.

**Please consider matters that will help you continue to prepare for your role as a Synod Commissioner or Youth Advisory Delegate.**

- **Prior to the September meeting, check out the synod's web site, [www.lakesandprairies.org](http://www.lakesandprairies.org).** Take some time to explore the site. You can find contact information to respond to the natural disasters in Iowa this past summer, links to a variety of resources, and information regarding the ministry and mission of the synod. The site will help you serve as a faithful interpreter to your presbytery.
- There is a **new news site** for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the synod continues to play a significant role in its development. **Presbyterian Neighbor News:** <http://lakesandprairies.pnnews.org>. Currently there are stories covering the upcoming healthy congregation and healthy pastors workshop in Des Moines, and the Google Tools workshop at the recent synod communicators conference.
- If you are not receiving the synod's e-newsletter, **Keeping in Touch**, please let Mary Kes know during the synod meeting. The newsletter is published every other week.
- The synod has a presence on [www.Facebook.com](http://www.Facebook.com). If you are a Facebook user, joining the synod's group is easy. Type in "Synod of Lakes and Prairies" in the "Search" box and join the group with the synod logo. If you are **not** a Facebook user, you will have to join before joining the group.