

Assembly Reflections - LaDonna Ekern

Church-wide assemblies are amazing -- it is incredible to see the church gather as 1 body -- filled first and foremost with a passion and love for Jesus Christ as Lord.

I was excited about the LIFT (Living Into the Future together) initiative --As we look into the future together this is a time for congregations, synods, groups and church-wide to look not only where they have been and currently are - but also what God might be calling them to do and be as together we do God's work with our hands. LIFT provides opportunity for witnessing to our oneness in Christ throughout the whole ELCA. As I reflected on this initiative - the problem I encountered was how to share, motivate and encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ within our congregations, conferences, synod to use this gift to discern new and exciting avenues for ministry and mission.

After the assembly I tried to put into words what I knew in the heart. The inspiration came at Disney world -- I was in the innovation area where there was the encouragement to see the world around us not with the eyes that only see what has been and what is in front of us - but to see with the eyes of imagination - to see with imaginative eyes as to what if and what could be!! To hear not just with our ears but listen with our heart to the needs of the people around us. To reach out not just within our comfort zone but with the arms of Christ to all people -- to move as Mary did from saying "How can this possibly be" to saying "let it be to me. What if, when God's disrupting grace enters our lives and calls us into deeper sacrifice, study and service, worship and witness we say yes Lord -- let it be in me, in us, in this church at this time.

We are no longer a church of the past -- we are no longer a church of us/them - we are a church on the move, guided by the Holy Spirit! We are a church looking into the future together for we need one another. We need the plethora of gifts the Spirit has given -- we are a church who inspired and guided by the spirit can bear fruit of love joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control

Evidence of the Spirit's leading was all around us participating in the church-wide assembly-- In 4 days we made a commitment to wipe out malaria -- are vote was put into action as we contributed \$ and pledged a total of as a start.

We passed a social statement on genetics - recognizing that faith and science go together as we daily lived as God's people -- caring about the hurts and needs of others.

This assembly was the first where we had youth as voting members -- they shared their concerns surrounding the prevalent issue of bullying many encounter on a daily basis - and are proud of a church that will stand up for individuals regardless of age, color, creed or sex.

It is awesome that we have a church who will center our time together, our actions and the decisions we are called to make with time in worship, Bible Study, prayer and praise. We are blessed to have a person like Bishop Mark Hanson as our presiding bishop -- his passion for Christ Jesus and his pastoral heart was evident - as he led people throughout the assemble, held a young person with stage 4 cancer and others in need of healing in prayer, as he defended the actions of lay volunteers who work faithfully and diligently behind the scenes; and as he led our assembly in ministry and witness of Word and Sacrament. We are also blessed to have a person like Bishop Jim Justman lead our synod -- the daily inspirational messages, being available for needs and questions - assuring all were ok cared for, and listened to and last but definitely not least we are blessed to have dedicated, passionate lay people serve in this church-especially John Emery - Synod V Pres who served on Reference and Counsel -- thanks John for ministry well done!

At our synod assembly we were watering the seeds of hope. At the church-wide assembly more seeds were planted that we are called to water in prayer and service -- Seeds planted as questions for reflection
Are we ready to be moved by the Spirit? Are we a how can this be-it can't be church OR are we a how can this be - here I am so let it be church? Has God been too domesticated in our churches? What if people looked at us - you and me, and state - wow - that must be what God looks like? What difference has the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ made in our lives and the life of our church? What is justice? Can we wipe out Malaria, Hunger.....Can we make a difference in the life of another? What is the mission and ministry God is calling you and your congregation to be involved in?

As we look into the future may we claim our identity in Christ - May we realize the gifts God has given to each of us in our baptismal call enable us to see ourselves as being an important member of the whole and calls us to center ourselves in Christ as we move forward in ministry and mission.; laying aside us /them and realize as the body of Christ God is calling us all - all are welcome, all are important, all are needed -