



# book of faith

Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews wrote,  
*“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”*

We find ourselves in changing times. Here at Bethany we have been preparing for the change that will come about as we celebrate Kathy Eggelston's 25 years of service as Minister of Music and the transitional time which follows. There is change as Caitlin Trussell begins her internship among us. Change is happening as Molly Sullivan spends an extra month of her internship among youth faith formation assisting us in the confirmation program. Kirsten Nelson Roenfeldt is transitioning from her summer time off to provide us home visits to youth and their families intentionally focused and designed around the Spiritual Gifts Assessment. Compensation for Molly's time and Kirsten's time are being paid from a fund that has been given to support youth ministries. Rit Vogel has been asked to research and develop a Summer Sunday School program for 2010 to expand her good work with the Vacation Bible School program. For many, summer is a time "change gears" so the program would be designed appropriately to allow for flexibility yet stay connected, as a family, to faith formation activities and the church. Rit's "increased hours" and Caitlin's compensation both are funded out of savings from the Founders' Campaign. We continue to pursue our discussions with Covenant Village regarding the partnership of a Health and Wellness Director. Today we met with the parish nurse who currently is serving in the pilot project. Pastor Paul Gilbertson continues to serve us as a visitation pastor. His compensation comes from the pastoral care line item in the budget. He averages 8-12 hours per week of service. Depending upon the hiring and implementation of the Health and Wellness Director position, Pastor Paul's time will be re-adjusted.

The actions of the churchwide assembly bring the issue and questions of change regarding rostered leaders in this church. I want to share with you excerpts from a letter that Bishop Hanson sent to clergy and other rostered leaders:

The assembly adopted 676-338 -- precisely two-thirds of those voting -- "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," the ELCA's 10th social statement, with minor editorial amendments. It also adopted a series of implementing resolutions with amendments. This theological and teaching document builds on the key Lutheran principles of justification by grace and Christian freedom to serve the neighbor. It emphasizes that central to our vocation, in relation to human sexuality, is the building and protection of trust in relationships. It therefore affirms that we are called to be trustworthy in our human sexuality and to build social institutions and practices where trust and trustworthy relationships can thrive. The social statement addresses marriage, same-gender relationships, families, protecting children, friendships, commitment, social responsibility and moral discernment. Regarding same-gender committed relationships, the social statement says that this

We had a discussion today at the staff meeting which focused on perceptions, questions and reactions. As one might expect there is the “known” and then also the “unknown.” A helpful guide or tool which we hope to get together very shortly is a set of usable talking points for staff and congregational leaders. Pastor Ruth Ann and I also plan on making “group visits” to present an update regarding the actions. I am also going to ask the Adult Learning Team to come up with a plan to do study regarding the Social Statement on Human Sexuality.

“Social statements are social policy documents, adopted by an ELCA Churchwide Assembly, addressing significant social issues. They provide an analysis and interpretation of an issue, set forth basic theological and ethical perspectives related to it, and offer guidance for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, its individual members, and its affiliated agencies and institutions. They are the product of extensive and inclusive deliberation within this church. Since 1991, the ELCA has adopted ten social statements.” <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements.aspx>

The ten social statements are:

Abortion

Church in Society

Death Penalty

Economic Life

Education

Environment

Health & Healthcare

Peace

Race, Ethnicity, & Culture

And now Human Sexuality

I am very grateful for the support many of you have shared with me regarding my participation at the CWA in leading the Friday Bible study with Peter Mayer. Additionally, I’ve started a “blitz” around GOD’s Standard or GOLD Standard. Currently, I am leading groups on Sunday night, Monday am, Monday night, Tuesday am and Saturday am. The Sunday night and Monday night groups are small group studies in homes.

Pastor Ruth Ann will update you on continuing plans for XYZ and Young At Heart.

Peace,

Pastor Ron



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Pastoral Response Following the Ministry Policies Decision  
Made to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly  
by Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson  
August 21, 2009

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*After the ministry policies vote on Friday evening, Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson delivered the following message:*

I want to share some words. As one you have called to serve as pastor of this church, I have been standing here thinking about my 23 years as a parish pastor and how differently I would go into various contexts. Gathering with a family or a group of people who had just experienced loss, or who perhaps were wondering if they still belonged, or in fact felt deeply that ones to whom they belong had been severed from them, I would probably turn to words such as Romans 8:

Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? [ . . . ] For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:34-35, 38-39).

But then I thought, what if I were going into a family, a group, or a community that had always wondered if they belonged, and suddenly now had received a clear affirmation that they belonged? All of the wondering about the dividing walls and feelings of separation seem to have dropped away. That would be a very different conversation. I would probably read to them out of Ephesians:

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh, he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. [ . . . ] In him, the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God (Ephesians 2:13-14, 21-22).

But then I thought, what if those two groups were together, but also in their midst were those who had neither experienced loss nor the feeling of the dividing wall of separation coming down, but were worried whether all that had occurred might sever the unity that is ours in Christ, and might be wondering if their actions might have contributed to reconciliation or separation? If all those people were together in a room, I would read from Colossians:

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:12-17).

That passage gives invitation and expectation that those deeply disappointed today will have the expectation and the freedom to continue to admonish and to teach in this church. And so, too, those who have experienced reconciliation today are called to humility. You are called to clothe yourselves with love. But we are all called to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, remembering again and again that we are called in the one body. I will invite you tomorrow afternoon into important, thoughtful, prayerful conversations about what all of this means for our life together. But what is absolutely important for me is that we have the conversation together.

I ended my oral report with these words: "We finally meet one another not in our agreements or our disagreements, but at the foot of the cross, where God is faithful, where Christ is present with us, and where, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are one in Christ."

Let us pray. Oh, God, gracious and holy, mysterious and merciful, we meet this day at the foot of the cross, and there we kneel in gratitude and awe that you have loved us so much that you would give the life of your son so that we might have life in his name. Send your Spirit this night, the Spirit of the risen Christ that has been breathed into us. May it calm us. May your Spirit unite us. May it continue to gather us. In Jesus' name, AMEN.