



North/West Lower Michigan Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
31 August 2014

From Craig, bishop of the church of Jesus Christ by the will of God,

To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ, rostered leaders of the North West Lower Michigan Synod ELCA—Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I suspect that you will not receive this letter until the waning days of September. In the spirit of Saint Paul, I write to you as part of a personal retreat on the last day of my first year as your bishop. I thank God for the opportunity to serve you in this calling. It is a privilege and an honor, ... and humbling.

“I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks as I remember you in my prayers” (Eph 1:15-16). I spent much of this year preaching and presiding in our synod’s congregations and come away with a profound sense of gratitude for your leadership. I am thankful that in these days of solitude I have had the opportunity to pray through the roster of our synod and to ask our God to bless, keep, sustain, and bring joy to each of you by name, and for those of you for whom I know more specifically what is on your hearts and minds, I have lifted those in prayer also. Upon reflection, I have some disappointment, both in myself and in this first year, that occasions to pray for and with you, and to extend more pastoral encouragement and support to you in your ministry, have been less frequent than I anticipated and planned, and certainly less frequent than I desire.

When I was elected bishop, then Presiding Bishop Mark Hansen recommended that I “tithe” my time to conflicted congregations, congregations with no interest in mission, troubled rostered leaders and rostered leaders in trouble and, instead, to strive to spend as much time as possible with healthy leaders and congregations with a passion for the *missio Dei*. Fifteen months after receiving this instruction, I find that it is easier said than done, at least for me. We are church together; nonetheless, at times I have been wearied by conflicts and boundary violations, and burdened by the truth that being called to attend to such matters has taken away time that I could use being a “shepherd to shepherds,” which is what I believe God is calling me to be. And so I ask for your patience and grace, even as I ask you to help me do better in several ways:

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- When you desire to have a pastoral conversation with me, please call Carrie at the Lansing Office (517-321-5066) and request to make an appointment or to speak to me on a “pastoral matter.” Please clarify the ideal or required time frame for my response so that I am able to prioritize more effectively. Importantly, inform Carrie if the matter is urgent so that regardless of where I am in the synod, I can return your call as soon as possible. The same applies for contacts with Pastors David and Sarah.
- Keep me informed. I’d rather be invited into conversation before things escalate. I’d always prefer to hear from you than about you. I learned from my bishop twenty years ago that asking for help or direction is a sign of health.
- Recognize that, in some circumstances, I cannot serve as your personal pastor, but I still am able to provide a recommendation or to refer you to another pastor. These circumstances may include such things as when a rostered leader is accused of conduct inconsistent with his or her office; when two rostered leaders are in conflict; when a rostered leader is in conflict with the congregation or agency; when I am the reason a rostered leader needs a pastor; when a rostered leader threatens the synod, including withholding mission support, legal action, or disaffiliation from the ELCA (whether an actual threat or implied); when a rostered leader (or his or her advocate) threatens in any way my family, my property or me, including threatening to have me removed from office, legal action, or physical harm (again, whether an actual threat or implied); or in other circumstances in which there is or could be an actual or perceived conflict of interest.
- Maintain an ongoing relationship with a pastor with whom I can partner in caring for and ministering to you. Ensure that your family members (spouse or partner, children, parents) have a pastor other than you. This is someone from whom you can hear the gospel and with whom you can make regular use of the means of grace, including confessing your sins and receiving God’s forgiveness.
- Recognize that boundary violations diminish the proclamation of the gospel, demand time, energy, and resources from synod staff, and have lasting consequences for congregations. Be proactive by availing yourself of boundary training so that you clearly understand and appreciate potentially dangerous situations and relationships. We are fortunate indeed that David

Sprang and Carrie Wygmans of our synod staff are trained to lead boundaries workshops, so we can offer them very affordably to you. The synod council Rostered Leaders
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and staff were trained this summer and the workshop is so much more encompassing than the training I received thirty years ago or even as a seminary professor. It includes social media, preaching, and relating to former congregations, as well as power dynamics, dual relationships, and healthy touch. Some have asked whether a bishop can require rostered leaders to attend boundary training; bishops cannot. Nonetheless, most bishops see the benefits of and strongly encourage such attendance. I expect our rostered leaders to voluntarily attend a boundary workshop every three years; regardless, rostered leaders are expected to have and are accountable for this knowledge.

The author of Ephesians praises Christ for, having ascended into heaven, giving gifts “that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (4:11-13). This praise is echoed in our prayers for ordination and consecration. When I came to my name on the roster, I asked God to grant that my second year as bishop will be more about “building up the body of Christ,” that I effectively “tithe” my time to conflict and discipline, and that I pastorally support and encourage healthy rostered leaders who share my passion for God’s mission.

I look forward to being with you at conference gatherings and the Autumn Leadership Event. In the meantime, I am remembering you in my prayers.

Peace,

The Rev. Craig Alan Satterlee, Ph.D., Bishop