

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 9/11/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, September 12 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those affected by the earthquake in Morocco and the flooding in Libya. Pray for those who are injured, missing, or displaced as well as those who search to find those who are unaccounted for. Give thanks to GOD for all who offer or bring help and support to our fellow human beings in their time of need.*

It is sad when Christians compete against and demean each other with the goal of bringing esteem to themselves. Even within the Lutheran Church this happens. Having talked about the more than forty different Lutheran denominations within the United States, I know that there are many that support and encourage one another. They recognize that, though they disagree on the teaching of certain principles from denomination to denomination, they recognize that we are still united by our common faith in JESUS CHRIST and our unique emphasis on GOD'S love shown and offered by grace through faith alone. Unfortunately, (and I recognize what I will be saying here may seem to fall into that realm of denigrating a fellow Christian group) there are some even within the Lutheran Church that perceive other Lutherans almost as an enemy.

For example, initially the rivalry between the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) and other Lutheran church bodies was a kind of competition similar to what happens in sports or between schools or other organizations. But as parts of the Lutheran Church in this country moved to more liberal or progressive positions in their interpretation of scripture and resulting practices, particularly with regard to leadership in congregations, the LCMS has become more aggressive in their disparagement. This really began in the 1970's when the predecessor bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) began to ordain women to serve as pastors. As the recognition of giftedness by GOD and expansion of inclusion to embrace homosexuals and others in lifelong, committed relationships as congregational leaders, the LCMS shifted their branding to one of "we're not *them*." They seemed to feel that making sure people knew that they rejected the practices of the ELCA and were a viable and unique alternative would bring others to join them. Yet they even set boundaries regarding their welcome to the point of excluding from communion anyone who wasn't Missouri Synod.

While there are many within the LCMS that do not subscribe to this isolation and restrictiveness with regard to even other Lutherans, the official position of the denomination is that their pastors cannot pray with other church leaders who were not LCMS. A few years ago, following the school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newton, Connecticut, a community prayer service was held there, and the local LCMS pastor attended. When denominational leadership found out, this pastor was required to apologize to the entire denomination at their churchwide assembly or be removed from their clergy roster.

I have several friends who are LCMS pastors who embrace fellowship with other clergy leaders. On one occasion, a LCMS clergy friend referred to me as ELCA, as in "el-ka," not "E-L-C-A." He was not aware, and I had to explain to him that "el-ka," is a pejorative or derogatory term used by many in the LCMS to demean members of the ELCA. He was very apologetic and had not realized that his denominational colleagues were using this term in a hurtful way.

I am disappointed whenever I hear how some are prevented from receiving the grace and mercy of GOD in the sacrament because they do not meet the humanmade requirements of a denomination. I am saddened whenever I hear others depreciating another believer because of differences in practice. We are fellow sisters and brothers in the body of CHRIST. JESUS spent much of HIS ministry engaging and welcoming all who wished to be a part of GOD'S Kingdom. GOD doesn't need us to try to protect GOD from those who do not meet humanmade standards. Rather, we need to follow the example of CHRIST and do all we can to invite and then welcome

those who wish to share in the life of GOD'S church, seeing them as no different from us—people for whom JESUS died.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey