

Moved With No Clear Forwarding Address

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A close family friend of mine recently moved without leaving a forwarding address, and because of that I have been left confused, hurt, and yes, even angry. I did not leave, my friend left me. In one expression or another I, along with generation upon generation of my family, have had a life-long relationship with this friend who has now packed up and left. We did not leave, our friend left. And so I'm left here sitting and wondering about how we - now in this estranged relationship - relate to all the things that I thought we held in common and have taught to our children and our children's children to be true. In various stages of this friend's life, this friend had helped to raise up faithful followers of God, lovers of Jesus, and people filled with the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. In the past, this friend was instrumental in training, equipping and sending out faithful teachers of God's Word. Yet now by the continuing actions of this friend, I am being told that I, my parents, grandparents, pastors and teachers, and those also sharing in this relationship for millennia before me have all been wrong. I am being told that finally, now in the year 2009, we are enlightened enough to move in a new "true" (*sic.*) direction.

From August 17-23, the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America met in Minneapolis. This was the friend who ended up having a week-long conversation with itself. As I watched the assembly, as much as I possibly could, on live internet video feed, I was reminded of God's Word that says in Judges 17:6 and 21:25, "In those days ... all the people did what was right in their own eyes." I am constantly reminded that our God is not a God of disorder and confusion, but rather a God of order. In fact throughout Scripture we can also read where God allows confusion precisely among those working in opposition to God.

The actions of the ELCA will, out of necessity, impact what is currently taught and published through ELCA institutions, and this will bring about confusion and contradiction with that which has been taught and published before. So how does this impact the ministry in and through Christ the King to our families, our community, the broader Body of Christ and the world?

Well, in a non-exhaustive way I'd like to make note of a few things which I know are of concern to people.

First of all, everyone is and always will be welcome to receive and participate in the life and ministry of this congregation. Our call is not to preach or teach social or political agendas of either the right or the left, but to clearly proclaim the transformational good news of Jesus Christ (*see 1 Cor. 2:2*). Secondly, though we are called to "teach and admonish each other with all wisdom" (*see Col. 3:16*), it is not our place to stand in conviction of anyone. That is the work of the Holy Spirit, (*see John 16:7-11*) and he is much better at that than we are. Thirdly, from nursery-age on through adult education, the pastors and parish education ministry at CTK have for years been writing / editing their own materials or have sought resources from other biblically solid publications. Curriculum produced by the ELCA has not been used for a long time, nor is currently being used.

But what about our relationship with this friend who has decided to move without leaving a clear forwarding address? For many of us who grew up within what I like to call the Lutheran alphabet soup, we may have special memories of past relationships with the ALC, the LCA, the AELC, the TALC, the ELC, the UELC, the ULCA, the LFC, Suomi, Augustana, Danish and other variations on that theme. Over the past 90 years all of those predecessor church bodies have given way to what is now the ELCA. For generations upon generations we have known that our identity and our salvation did not come through any one particular serving of that Lutheran alphabet soup, and we must also remember today that our identity and our salvation does not come through the ELCA. Our identity is in Jesus Christ, first, last and always. Our salvation is in Christ alone, the Word made flesh! (*See Eph. 2:4-5*)

Grace alone! Faith alone! Word alone! This is what we at Christ the King will continue to uphold and preach and teach. We have not left, but a friend of ours has left us without a clear forwarding address, and right now none of this seems to make much sense. In closing I paraphrase John 6:67-69.

So Jesus asked the people of Christ the King, "Do you also wish to go away?" The people answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."