



Dear Friends in Christ,

People have asked me what has been good and what has been difficult about our leaving the ELCA to join LCMC.

First off, we miss the 6 members who left Peace to join ELCA congregations in Hebron and Bruning. But at the same time, we are happy to welcome 5 folks who are joining our congregation because they want to be part of an LCMC congregation.

Second, I am no longer attending the local ELCA clergy weekly lectionary study. Originally I thought I would continue to participate in that group. Colleagues invited me to continue. But my presence seemed to cause discomfort for others. So I am looking for new ways to develop mutual support relationships with other pastors. I participate in the monthly Thayer County ministerial group which I have found to be very supportive. I also know several LCMC clergy who are wonderful colleagues.

Third, we no longer have a handy supply of local pastors who will serve on call for pastoral emergencies when I am out of town. Our nearest LCMC neighbors are in Blue Hill and Beatrice. Our local ELCA friends could face discipline from their bishop for serving an LCMC congregation. Mark Baldwin, the Methodist pastor in Hebron, is willing to provide emergency pastoral care when I am gone. But at this point, we are still trying to figure out all our options for emergency pastoral care when I am out of town.

Fourth, in recent years we have enjoyed the ministry and supply preaching of former members Leah Krotz and Don Koester. However, PMAs (Parish Ministry Associates) in the ELCA have been told by their bishops that they can't preach in LCMC

congregations. So Leah and Don cannot preach here without risking the loss of their PMA certification in the ELCA. I don't want to ask them to do that.

So what will we do? LCMC is all about congregations growing up and learning to be the Church instead of depending on others to do things for them. In the future, when I am out of town, we will be looking to our own congregational leaders to preach and lead worship. I think that will be good for us. That is how leadership develops.

Fifth, personally, I have been very encouraged and uplifted by participating in LCMC gatherings and leadership events. The quality of leadership in LCMC is high. LCMC has grown to over 600 congregations in the US including 61 congregations that have joined in the first 4 months of this year. We are one of 29 LCMC congregations in Nebraska.

In LCMC, congregations are encouraged to take the initiative. So one of our neighbor congregations, Living Word in Seward, has invited us and other area congregations to a "Moving Forward" LCMC Workshop on Sunday, June 5. Pastor Mark Vander Tuig, the LCMC Service Coordinator, will be the featured speaker. We don't have a bishop, but Mark does a great job of representing the heart and soul of LCMC. I would like to encourage as many as possible to come join us in Seward on June 5.

Sixth, I am relieved that we are free from the struggle and debate about the direction of the ELCA. So many congregations are still in conflict. We are free to move forward. I am looking forward to the next few years at Peace when we will be considering how to deepen our worship life, strengthen our youth ministry, and energize our participation in the global mission of Christ's Church around the world.

The next few years will bring some changes to Peace. None of the changes we make will be forced on us by LCMC. All of the changes we make will be because we are free to try new things to serve the cause of Christ in our community and our world. So let's get going.

Yours in Christ, *Phil Nielsen*