
Daily Devotions

July 1-7, 2018

By Bishop Emeritus Dale Skogman
Gladstone, Michigan

Sunday, July 1, 2018

“And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send and who will go for me?’ Then I said ‘Here am I, send me.’” Isaiah 6:8

For several years, as a member of First Lutheran, Gladstone, I have written articles for the church newsletter encouraging people to consider ordained ministry. It’s been a joint effort between me, the pastors and members of the congregation which has born much fruit! Over the past several years ten persons from the congregation have been ordained. Acknowledging our achievement, Bishop Emeritus Tom Skrenes was led to call First Lutheran “The mother church of pastors!” I have decided in my devotional series to share some of my newsletter ordination “promo” with the hope that others from our synod will also be inspired to pursue ordination.

Pastor Katherine Finegan became our new bishop as of September 1, 2017. She will face many challenges as she assumes office, one of them being sixteen congregations with pastoral vacancies and a major shortage of pastors to fill them. We must all seek to do all that we can to identify, encourage and support people to pursue ordained ministry.

In that light let me share with you a story. Several years ago a church in France was bombed. The members of the church, assisted by soldiers, sought to restore the church. The structure was cleared of rubble and stained-glass windows, pews and the altar were refurbished. Among the debris was a broken statue of Christ. The people sought to cement all the broken pieces together, but they couldn’t find Jesus’ hands. A woman of the parish made a sign saying, “HE HAS NO HANDS BUT OURS!”

So it is that if the message of Jesus Christ is to be proclaimed and our churches staffed with pastors we must answer God’s call to become his hands, arms and voices in service of the church in the future. Will you or someone you know answer God’s call to ordained ministry? Let us pray in the words of a familiar hymn...

*“Take my life that I may be,
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee,
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

*Take my hands and let them move,
At the impulse of thy love,
Take my feet and let them be,
Swift and beautiful for Thee.” Amen*



Monday, July 2, 2018

"The blessing of the Lord makes rich." Proverbs 10:22 a

As I encourage others to pursue ordained ministry I want to share my own story in the hope that it might inspire others. As a fourth-generation member of the big community of Felch, MI, I was born into a staunchly Lutheran family. My maternal great grandmother, Brita Skog, was a founding member of Zion Lutheran Church in Metropolitan. She provided the impetus for the construction of the first church, donated the land on which it was built and arranged for pastoral services until the first pastor was called. It was a life-long dream of hers that a member of the family would become a pastor and her hopes were not fulfilled until I, her great grandson, was ordained.

Raised in Zion congregation, I was baptized, attended Sunday School, Vacation Church School, confirmation and the youth group. I also taught Sunday School. To my utter amazement, members of the congregation suggested to me that I should become a pastor. One afternoon, coming home from school, my parents informed me that the Reverend Carl Pontus Peterson, my pastor, had paid them a visit suggesting that I become a pastor! Ugh!

Growing up, I was always well provided for, but cash was often in short supply and our daily existence was definitely humble. Ordained ministry was not a part of my plan! As I showed some academic promise, my parents agonized as to how I might be the first in my extended family to afford the luxury of a college education. It was my dream to pursue a career that would definitely improve my financial bottom line.

A business major seemed like my ticket to success. This dream ended when I witnessed the cut throat business world through the experience of my brother who was fifteen years my senior and employed in management in the air craft industry. Now, faltering in my career plans, college counselors encouraged me to pursue a career in politics or elementary education.

Finally, I came to the realization that I had been denying God's call to ordained ministry expressed through those who knew me and an inner voice within me. Finally, after two years of college I went to my knees before God and prayed "Okay God, have it your way, I will pursue ministry, but I also pray that if it's not to be you will give me a strong sign."

Well, as they say, "The rest is history." I have been an ordained pastor for fifty-three years, blessed by God and made rich indeed. Is God calling you or someone you know, like me, to ordained ministry?

Prayer: *Dear God in each stage and phase of life help me to know and to follow your will for me. May I also be your instrument in guiding others to know your will for their lives including possible service as a pastor. Amen.*



Tuesday, July 3, 2018

"For freedom Christ has set us free, stand fast therefore." Galatians 5:1

Paul Tillich, a famous theologian, wrote and preached a sermon entitled “You Are Accepted.” It became famous. It was about God’s grace and our worth in God’s eyes. On the corner of the manuscript it is said he wrote: “For myself.” Apparently even this highly respected writer, preacher and teacher, who knew the theology of grace inside and out, was not easily “acceptable.”

Tillich’s comment “For myself” should also be assuring and comforting to all of us. We also need assurance that we are set free in Christ and therefore acceptable to Him and our Heavenly Father. This is particularly true when we consider answering God’s call to ordained ministry. God calls us not to be perfect but to be faithful.

A friend and pastoral colleague once shared with me that he had struggled with a low self-esteem. He attended a retreat where before anyone spoke they said their name and the spiritual director led the group in affirming applause. When the person finished speaking hands clapped again. Over and over the affirmation was repeated.

The retreat was a life changing experience for the young man who later became a faithful and competent ordained pastor. The applause, letting everyone know they were acceptable before they even said a word was a moment of supreme grace. It softened hearts, made smiles, and convinced the participants of their worthiness.

The best acceptance comes from God. The message of grace from our Creator is the good word... “You are acceptable.” That’s the Good News of the Gospel. It’s the message of spring that overcomes the darkness of winter. “You are accepted!”

If you or someone you know are contemplating ordained ministry, please know that God does not call perfect people to be pastors. He calls people to be faithful, knowing that God’s grace is sufficient for all, ordained or not.

Is God calling you or someone you know to ordained ministry?

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for accepting me in Your great love. Help me to share with others that you also love them and that He has a plan for their lives that will bring them joy, ordained or not. Amen.*



Wednesday, July 4, 2018

“... do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” Nehemiah 8:10

In the Old Testament the prophet Nehemiah instructs those who would be God’s witnesses not to lose hope but to maintain a sense of joy in their calling.

The same might be said of anyone who considers entering into ordained ministry today! A sense of humor can go a long way in overcoming challenges. In that spirit Pastor Roy Johnson of Minneapolis made a “tongue in cheek” list of things that might delight and bring joy to a pastor or someone considering becoming a pastor:

The Pastor's Top Ten List
Things people might say that tickle the pastor.
(In your dreams!!!)

10. Hey, stop that fighting! We'll all get our turn to sit in the front pew.
9. Pastor, that sermon changed my entire life.
8. Personally, I find it more enjoyable to invite others to church than golfing.
7. I'm going to give our church the \$100 I used to send monthly to TV evangelists.
6. I would like to volunteer to be a permanent usher.
5. Forget the synod's salary minimum. I say we pay the pastor a professional wage.
4. Don't you just love it when we sing unfamiliar hymns?
3. Pastor, we'd like to send you to this really neat seminar in the Bahamas.
2. Hey, these are "the good old days." Let's change everything!
1. Nothing inspires me like a three hour annual meeting!

If you are an ordained pastor, are considering a call to ordained ministry, or are a lay congregational member, I encourage you to maintain a sense of humor. We can enter not only His courts with thanksgiving but into God's service as well.

No joke! Is God calling you or someone you know into ordained ministry?

Prayer: *Dear God, help us all to be cheerful Christians whether we are ordained or lay members of your church. Help us to remember that a sense of humor can calm many troubled waters. Amen.*



Thursday, July 5, 2018

"... Each has their own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another." 1 Cor. 7:7a

An old soldier, worn out in the service of his country, began playing the violin on the street to earn his living. One day, on the streets of Vienna, his hand trembled so severely that he could no longer play. A passerby stopped to say: "Friend, you are too old and too feeble, give me your violin."

The stranger played so sweetly that a crowd soon gathered, and coins poured into the tattered hat of the soldier. The new violinist emptied the money into the soldier's pocket and played again, more sweetly than before. Again the hat was filled with money, which was turned over to the veteran soldier. The stranger finally handed the violin back and was on his way.

"Who is it? Who is it, asked the bystanders?"

"Why, that was Boucher, the great violinist," someone exclaimed.

And so it was. The master violinist had taken the man's place, had assumed his poverty, endured his disgrace, played his music and earned his living. He had made a sacrifice for the old soldier.

Christ, the great Master, seeing our feeble, fruitless efforts, will take our talents, however poor, and use them for His heavenly purpose.

Is God calling you or someone you know to ordained ministry? Remember, "Each has his own special gift from God, one of a kind and one of another" and in the hands of the Master great things can be accomplished in the kingdom. Don't be afraid to entrust your gifts into the Master's hands!

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, help me to entrust my gifts into Your hands so that I can serve You fruitfully and enable me to encourage others to use their gifts for Your Kingdom either as lay people or ordained pastors. Amen.*



Friday, July 6, 2018

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news." Luke 4:18a

At the beginning of His ministry Jesus entered the synagogue and astounded the wise men gathered there stating that the scriptures were fulfilled as He was anointed to proclaim good news to the poor. The church today sorely needs people to follow in the footsteps of Jesus proclaiming the Good News of the gospel. Who, in the Northern Great Lakes Synod will answer God's call to ordained ministry? I want to share a little story which reveals how, in Christian charity, we can proclaim good news in a troubled world.

A woman, a few months after moving to a new town, complained about the poor service at the local drug store. She told a new acquaintance hoping she would repeat it to the store owner.

The next time she went to the drugstore:

- + The owner greeted her with a big smile.
- + He told her how happy he was to see her again.
- + He said he hoped she liked the town.
- + He further said that she should let him know if there was anything he could do to help her and her husband get settled.
- + Then he filled her order promptly and efficiently.

Later the woman reported the marvelous change to her friend saying, "I suppose you told him how poor I thought the service was?" "No," said her friend, "I hope you don't mind but I told him:

- + You were amazed how he had built up the small town drug store.
- + I said you thought it was one of the best drug stores you had ever seen.

Our calling as Christians is to share the "good news" of Jesus Christ in a troubled and contentious world! Discord is rampant in society, government, the news media, among families and on the world scene! We are in sore need of persons, lay and ordained, to proclaim the "Good News" of Jesus Christ. Who will answer God's call to proclaim the Gospel?!

Prayer: Dear God, help me to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel in our troubled world and help us all to lift up people to proclaim the Gospel from our pulpits as well. Amen.



Saturday, July 7, 2018

"I remind you to rekindle the gift that is within you." 2 Timothy 4:6a

A man was exploring caves by the seashore. In one of the caves he found a canvas bag with a bunch of hardened dry balls. It was like someone had rolled clay balls and left them out in the sun to bake.

They didn't look like much, but they intrigued the man, so he took the bag out of the cave with him. As he strolled along the beach, he would throw the clay balls, one at a time, out into the ocean as far as he could.

He thought little about it until he dropped one of the dry balls and it cracked open on a rock. Inside was a beautiful, precious stone.

Excited, the man started breaking open the remaining clay balls. Each contained a similar treasure. He found thousands of dollars worth of jewels in the twenty or so clay balls he had left.

Then it struck him! He had been on the beach a long time. He had thrown maybe fifty or sixty of the clay balls with their hidden treasure into the ocean waves. Instead of thousands of dollars in treasure, he could have taken home tens of thousands, but he had just thrown it away!

It's like that with people. We look at someone, maybe even ourselves, and we see the external clay vessel. There is a treasure in each one of us. If we take the time to get to know others and ourselves God can show us the way He sees us. Then the clay begins to peel away and the brilliant gem begins to shine forth.

May we not come to the end of our lives and find out that we have thrown away the gems hidden within us!

In the Northern Great Lakes Synod we have many "gems," people with different gifts and abilities using them to serve God and God's people. We all have a "call" from God for service. Some are called to ordained ministry. Some are called to other forms of ministry. Let's seek out and encourage the gifts we have including those with gifts to become pastors.

Prayer: Dear God, our synod contains many "gems", people who serve You faithfully and with joy. Help us to see and share the gifts that we possess and the gifts possessed by others. Amen.

