

11-1-2008

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Recommended Citation

Grundahl, Allan A. (2008) "In Christ ... a future with hope," *Consensus*: Vol. 33 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol33/iss1/10>

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HISTORICAL SERIES, 18

In Christ ... A Future With Hope

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The Rev. Dr. Allan A. Grundahl was the second Bishop of the Saskatchewan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church In Canada, serving in that ministry from 1993 to 2002. During the next year he served as the Interim Director of Spiritual Care in the LutherCare Communities in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and retired in 2004. This sermon was his last as Bishop, and was preached 4 July 2002 at the Opening Service of the Saskatchewan Synod Convention held in Swift Current, Saskatchewan.

Texts: Jeremiah 29:11-14; Romans 8:18-27; John 17:1-6, 17-26

Dear Friends in Christ: This is a very special time for all of us to gather from all across this Saskatchewan Synod of our Evangelical Lutheran Church In Canada! We recognize the wondrous truth of tonight's first scripture: "In Christ ... A Future With Hope."

What a significant time it is to be assured of hope:

- when we face the election of our next Bishop;
- when we lift our horizons in mission with a new dimension in the "Companion Synod" programme with our sisters and brothers in Argentina;
- when we wonder about mission on our own doorstep here in Saskatchewan as well as across Canada;
- when we rejoice in our new accord with Anglicans,¹ and start linking with other denominations, too;
- when we ponder the future search for new directions in the way this Synod functions.

It is certainly well for us that all these considerations begin in this hour, in *worship* of the God who speaks: "Surely I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, "plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."

Of course, I am also very personally aware that my own active service as your Bishop is ending. That ending comes with mixed

feelings. Yet it is also a very exciting time with so many possibilities ahead in this Synod, and so I also rest assured that “in Christ there is still a future, with much hope.”

In Christ, God will raise up a new leadership. In Christ, God will inspire vision for mission. In Christ, God will move us in different directions.

The joy of the Christian faith is the assurance that God is in charge of God’s Church, and in charge of all God’s world. You and I are called to work and serve, but all does not depend on our efforts; God’s Spirit moves in wondrous ways, even in trying times. I have seen it all over this Synod as I have travelled about. Most of my years in this ministry have been challenging years for our farmers; less obviously challenging years, but very real, nevertheless, for a number of folks in our cities; and challenging church times, too, when usually one-fifth of our ninety-three parishes are without pastors. And yet, what a joy to encounter leaders in each setting who are deeply dedicated to the faith in Jesus Christ, willing and determined to carry on so the gospel is proclaimed. In Christ ... there is certainly a future with hope!

However, there’s been a change in the last decade. We Lutheran Christians have been made aware how the proclamation of the gospel must be done more and more in concert with other believers in the Christian faith. I am amazed at this change in my own life. I’ve come out of a very conservative piety, very suspicious of other Christian groups, and now I find that ecumenical excitement has become the strongest driving force in my psyche! I wish I could say that the growing desire to work together as Christians has risen out of Christ’s prayer for unity in John 11 (our Gospel reading); but even though that part of scripture has really burned itself into my consciousness, I’m afraid I have to admit humbly that I, and we, have moved toward more Christian unity mainly because of declining membership and declining stewardship, along with the growing secular attitudes in our society.

Only recently, however, have I started to see that God actually works through such failures. While the pure intent of our Lord has been evident for some 2,000 years that we Christians should be one in ways that are noticed by the world (obvious!), maybe it takes our shortcomings for God to let us know that *we* are not in charge of everything! It takes the Spirit of God moving, even through difficulties, to push us toward the unity expressed in Christ’s prayer. *Only* in Christ is there a future with hope! We are simply privileged to be a part of it.

It's all a part of the maturing of the people of God, and certainly there are bright spots along the way! I hope you sense something of a new dimension in this worship service which highlights our "Companion Synod" arrangement with Argentina; it's wonderful to have Patricia Vargas with us for this Convention.

What is the new dimension? We all know the traditional view of mission, namely, the sending of missionaries to other lands to people who have never heard the gospel. Certainly there are still some parts of the earth like that, but the communication changes of the last century have brought us together into a global village like never before. So now we are recognizing that Christian Churches in other countries have been established for many years now, and the great need in *our* time is to walk together with one another, respecting in each other the ways in which God has worked in each of our settings, and thus learning from each other and supporting each other as companions together with each other.

I think it is very significant to have both the Kiel family here, as well as Patricia Vargas. As you know, all our plans — both in Argentina and here — were for the Kiels to be in Argentina for a much longer time, but a number of adversities has changed those plans. Now, I think, the "companion" nature of our relationship is really visible to us in the presence of Patricia Vargas who will soon be ordained a pastor and serve in the same area of Argentina where the Kiels have been.

So the truth of God's holy Word is *demonstrated*: it isn't so much who the personalities of leadership are as it is the power of God's Spirit in Jesus Christ as we work together as companions. In Christ ... a future with hope!

Yet, many concerns are on my mind: leadership, mission efforts (especially here in Saskatchewan), the need for more cooperation across this Synod. All of these concerns are brought together in the "future search" for new directions in this Synod, to enable us to accomplish the mission of the church and give us "a future with hope ... in Christ." A great deal of effort has gone into the beginning of the process to look at new directions. You have seen the reports presented to this Convention; many fine suggestions have been made and insights articulated, and some major goals are presented. Most of it concentrates on the practicalities of how we function; yet, of course, all that is under-girded by the mission our Lord has given us.

The foundations remain. God is a God of care and love and concern for us all. But God is also straightforward with us to recognize sin and evil and demonic powers at work in each of us and our whole world. Yet we venture into new ways in our time simply because of the best news of all: in Christ, the terribleness of everything amiss in our lives — from the little white lies to 9/11 — is countered with God’s offer of forgiveness — acceptance and new beginnings are possible. We are assured with the gift of God’s Holy Spirit that God continues to guide into newness. “In Christ ... a future with hope” supported by the bed-rock foundations of the faith.

So we continue to baptize into this living faith, even if it means a Baptism unto death in terrible conditions. But we are never left alone; we are nourished by God’s Word and Holy Communion. Thus we can face the issues of new directions in this Synod as the Spirit of God guides.

What a joy to have served our Lord and you in this Church!
Thank you for your partnership in the gospel!

Look confidently to the future, not because of ourselves, but because God Almighty leads: In Christ ... a future with hope! Amen.

Notes

- ¹ In 2001 *The Waterloo Declaration*, the proposal for “full communion” between the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, was resoundingly accepted by both Churches.