



Dear Friends in Christ,

I have always like winter, but this year has offered a little more winter than I really enjoy. It has been a hard couple of weeks. In addition to the dark and cold of winter, we have also experienced the stress of making difficult decisions for our congregations.

I want to say “thank you” to everyone who participated in the discussion and in the special congregational meeting of January 24. It wasn’t fun. I’d rather have been doing almost anything else. However, I am so appreciative of the way you handled this stressful decision. You spoke with the courage of your convictions. You challenged one another without belittling one another. You were thoughtful and careful. You took time to listen.

Still the decision was a painful one. We are not celebrating this decision. We have made a decision that hurts some of our brothers and sisters in Christ both within our congregation and beyond. The truth is that we will all probably feel loss because of this decision. Our decision will cost us valuable relationships in the ELCA. Over the years we have experienced many blessings through the ELCA.

Many things about Peace Lutheran Church will stay the same. Worship, education, and local ministry will all continue pretty much as they have. We will support some of the same mission partners that we have in the past, and

we will find new mission partners to support. As part of the LCMC there will be many choices and decisions for us to make. The next 12 months will be busy ones for us as we think through what all this means.

Our decision committed us to a year of prayer and discernment. I want to challenge you to take that commitment seriously. This is a significant decision that calls us all to prayer, study, and discussion. The issues are complex. There are many perspectives to consider. There are good and bad argument on both sides. Please open your heart and mind to think through both sides of this decision. You owe that to the members of this congregation who voted differently than you did. I long to more deeply understand the feeling and thoughts of everyone on this decision. I believe others’ questions and thoughts can help me go deeper in my own understanding. If we can’t state clearly the opinion of those who disagree with us, then we haven’t yet studied the issue deeply enough.

We will have several opportunities to discuss this decision in the coming months. I have invited my friend, Pastor Scot McCluskey to lead us in a discussion of the 2009 ELCA Assembly’s decisions. Pastor McCluskey is serving Salem Lutheran Church north of Superior. He believes the ELCA made the right decisions regarding sexuality and he makes strong arguments for his views. He will be with us to share his thoughts and respond to our questions on Monday, February 8, 2010, at 7:30 PM. One thing I love about Pastor Scot is that I can argue quite strongly with him and he still loves me as a brother in Christ. Bring your questions and concerns to share with Pastor Scot and we can argue and laugh and learn.

Meanwhile, Lent begins in February. On the Wednesdays of Lent, I will be re-creating the five first-person monologs I presented nine years ago based on characters from Luke’s Gospel: John, Barabbas, Simon of Cyrene, the thief, and Joseph of Arimathea.

Yours in Christ, *Phil Nielsen*