

A Message From Pastor Nielsen

 JULY ~ 2010

Dear Friends in Christ,

One of the themes of the Gospel of Luke is the theme of joy. In my reading of the Gospel of Luke this summer, I have come across 24 verses in the gospel that refer to “joy”, “rejoicing”, or “celebrating”. I think that means that followers of Jesus are supposed to be joyful people. I think that means that the Church should be a fun place.

We Lutherans can get a little boring and predictable. So it is good for us to have a week of Vacation Bible School every summer to lighten us up. This year’s VBS included 30 preschool and kindergarten students and 35 elementary-aged students. Just as important, we had 14 teens who took time to serve as VBS helpers. And we had a dozen adults who were along for the ride. Cindy Mueller did a great job organizing this year’s program. We explored the celebrations of the Church Year with music, crafts, church mouse puppets, drama, games, and snacks. It was a fun week.

On VBS Sunday (June 13) I told the gathering of worshippers we were going to have a little fun that Sunday and then next week we could go back to being Lutheran. Well, sure enough, the next Sunday the first six rows of the church were empty. We were back to being Lutheran. But I hope a little of the fun of VBS lingers in our midst as we seek, celebrate, and share the peace of Christ together with our community and our world.

Good News! Peace Lutheran Church has called a new administrator and teacher for our Peace Early Education Preschool. We are very pleased to announce that Diane Beikmann has accepted our call and will begin serving in August. When you see Diane about town, please welcome her to our preschool program.

Our church council met with Bishop David deFreese of our Nebraska Synod this past month. Bishop deFreese will return in September to meet with our congregation as we continue our process of

discerning our future relationship with the ELCA. Several people have asked me to explain how the ELCA came to the decision of recognizing and accepting same-sex unions in the Church. I have struggled to explain how we got to this point.

Recently I came across what I think is an excellent article explaining both sides of this complex and challenging debate in the ELCA. I found it on the website of the Central / Southern Illinois Synod of the ELCA. “Two Sides: Understanding the ELCA Today” was written by an ELCA pastor in Illinois. It is the most concise, clear, and fair summary of both sides of the argument that I have come across. It is printed on pages 15 and 16 of this newsletter. I hope you will find it educational and helpful.

The world seeks victory by destroying its enemies. But as followers of Jesus, we are more than conquerors. We seek victory by loving our enemies. As Martin Luther taught, the eighth commandment calls us to fear and love God so that we do not betray, slander, or lie about our neighbors, but defend them, speak well of them, and *explain their actions in the kindest way*.

Our debates within the world of politics and within the Church are golden opportunities to practice the eighth commandment and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. That means that even though we may disagree with our neighbor about some very important matters, we love them, treat them with dignity, and give them the benefit of the doubt. We can disagree about politics and about theology without calling into question the integrity and faith of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

God is good all the time. Let’s celebrate that this summer.

Yours in Christ, *Phil Nielsen*