



Dear friends in Christ,

In January we committed ourselves to making this year a year of prayer and discernment about the future of Peace Lutheran Church. We called ourselves to listen carefully and to prayerfully seek God's will for our relationship with our partners in ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

At times I think this decision is not such a big issue. From one perspective moving from ELCA to LCMC is no more significant than my move from Immanuel Stateline Lutheran Church at Wymore to Peace Lutheran Church in Deshler. It called for prayer and discernment. It caused some tears and stress. But all is well. Most congregations are gracious toward members who transfer to other congregations for various reasons. I would hope the ELCA would be gracious to congregations who transfer to other denominations for various reasons.

At other times I think that this is really a huge decision. A decision to leave the ELCA for another church fellowship will cause pain for people both within our congregation and beyond our congregation. Some in our ELCA family will receive such a decision as a slap in the face even though we intend no such hurt. We are not trying to divorce ourselves from the people of the ELCA. We are considering ending our institutional relationship with the ELCA. We believe that our spiritual and emotional relationship with our ELCA brothers and sisters goes much deeper than our organizational relationship.

Last month the church council received letters from former members and dear friends, Tim Koester and Kayleigh Koester. They shared their feelings about the vote we took last January. I asked the council for permission to share these letters in our newsletter for two main reasons. First, I invite you to read the letters because I want to assure those who are hurt by our decisions regarding the ELCA that we are listening to them and hearing their pain. In fact, we share their pain. There is nothing easy or comforting in our decisions.

Second, I want you to know that although I personally disagree with some of the opinions in their letters, I still love and respect both Tim and Kayleigh as my family in Christ. From my perspective our disagreement about the future of Peace Lutheran Church has not changed my relationship with them.

Bishop David deFreese of our Nebraska Synod will be visiting with our church council on May 11. I am also spending time reading, studying, and engaging in conversation with others about the issues that have brought us to this point. I still have many questions for which I am still seeking answers. In prayer I am still asking God for guidance and direction, along with understanding and peace for us as a congregation, for myself individually, and for our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

I have written a letter in response to Kayleigh. If you are interested in reading my response, I am willing to share copies of that letter. As we continue through this year of prayer, listening, and discernment, let us trust that God's Spirit will give us all the insight and guidance, and all the love and courage we need.

Yours in Christ, *Phil Nielsen*