

Dear People of the Northern Great Lakes Synod,

Before my sabbatical begins, I have a host of annual medical check-ups that I want to get out of the way before boarding a plane to the other side of the world. While the tests are all routine, they are always accompanied by the question, "How are you today? Any complaints?" And I have to think about it. How AM I? How aware am I of what my body might be trying to tell me. Sure, there are the usual complaints. When I sit for too long, as in a long car ride, I feel stiff and I might groan a little as I get out of the car. On my morning walk, I might feel a point of pain in a knee or hip, telling me to slow down or change my stride. If I'm tired already at 9pm, I hear my body telling me to rest, even though I haven't watched the news yet.

What does your body say to you?

And when we apply this kind of communication to the body of Christ, what might that look like? I have at least one answer; it looks like the Churchwide Assembly.

For one whole week at the end of July and into August, the body of Christ that is the voting members of all of our ELCA synods gathered in Phoenix, Arizona and we communicated. One body communicated with another, "I don't care if it's dry heat, it's still HOT!" and in turn, different parts of the body of Christ communicated to the whole a host of concerns and joys with calls for solidarity, accompaniment, and reconciliation.

Paul writes in I Corinthians 12, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ. ...If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one

member is honored, all rejoice together with it."

While gathered in assembly, we listened to points of pain...from the newly elected bishop of the Lutheran church in Jordan and the Holy Land, from our Jewish siblings, from our Young Adults, from our Indigenous members. And the body responded by adopting a Memorial on Indian Boarding School Remembrance and wearing red to raise awareness of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls. The body responded by adopting a Memorial that calls for the End of Occupation of Palestine. The body responded by moving the goal for young adult participation on Churchwide committees from 10% to 20%.

The body celebrated the strides taken toward greater clarity as we adopted our newest Social Statement: Faith and Civic Life which will be featured among the offerings of our Winter Lifelong Faith Formation classes.

We stood in solidarity with AMMPARO at a candlelit vigil and as one body, prayed for peace and welcome for so many fleeing violence and looking for a place of safety.

And the body rejoiced at the election of our new presiding bishop, Rev. Yehiel Curry and a new Churchwide secretary, Rev. Cece Mills. I have known Bishop Curry as a colleague in Region 5 for several years. He most recently also served as the Chair of the Conference of Bishops. Bishop Curry is financially astute, has gifts for leadership, is blessed with a pastor's heart, is a powerful preacher, and I have every hope and confidence that he will be a blessing to the body of Christ that is the ELCA. I encourage you to watch the interviews that have been posted on the NGLS and ELCA Facebook pages.

Listening to the whole body takes intention.
Responding to the needs of the body takes
communication. There may well be actions
taken at the churchwide assembly that for you,
are too quick a pace or too slow for your stride.
There may still be points of pain that you are
experiencing that have not yet been addressed.
For your own body, and for the body of Christ
that is our ELCA Church, I believe we are all
doing the best that we can, to work towards
health and wholeness.

I am so very glad to be a part of the body of
Christ that is the Northern Great Lakes Synod. I
returned home from Phoenix all the more
grateful for trees and grass, for dewy mornings
and evening rain. And I am grateful for who we
are in relationship with each other, whatever
your pace, whatever the length of your stride,
as we walk together in faith.

Yours in Christ,
Bishop Katherine Finegan