

“We’ve Been Here Before”

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In my previous article for the March/April Northern Light, I noted that there is value in reflecting on the past. There is value for Christians and the church to reflect on how Christians and the church have lived and spoken in the context of their own time frames. Reading the book of Acts and the challenges and amazing fluidity of the early church, we can find strength and hope in truly understanding that God’s people have been here before—both through the good and the bad. The players may have changed, but the basic patterns of life and humanity are amazingly similar.

It’s in this spirit of reflecting on the past, that I want to share some perspectives from past synod bishops of the Northern Great Lakes Synod. For this article, I’m sharing some perspectives from the second bishop of the Northern Great Lakes Synod, Dale Skogman (bishop 1991-1999).

In the August 1991 edition of “Northern Lights-Notes and Quotes”, Bishop Skogman reflected on “Long Range Planning”, just as he was beginning as bishop. Bishop Skogman wrote the following:

- ***A “realistic” appraisal has been made of the spiritual, human, and material resources that the synod possesses...***
- ***A “creative” effort has been made to utilize the resources of the synod for the fullest ministry possible, and that ministry has been “positive” in its focus on the “gifts” of the synod, and not its “lacks”.***
- ***One of the richest resources of the synod is its people who have “voluntarily” given of their time, talents, energies, and resources to the collective ministry of the synod.***
- ***God’s people are performing God’s ministry out of commitment and delight, without costly and cumbersome bureaucratic structuring!***

In the December 1991 edition of “Northern Light-Notes and Quotes”, Bishop Skogman reflected on “pastoring” vs “bishopsing”:

- ***There are more similarities than differences!***
- ***Like a parish pastor, I work hard, write sermons, see people in joy and pain, watch attendance and offering statistics with anxiety, sometimes “seek to please,” sometimes need to take a “firm stand” ...and I appreciate an often needed word of affirmation.***
- ***When asked, “What is your most fervent prayer?”: “That I am faithful!” I assume that as a pastor, and/or leader in Christ’s Church, your hopes, concerns and prayers might be the same? Thanks for the partnership!***

In the January 1999 edition of “Northern Light-Notes and Quotes”, Bishop Skogman reflected on the stress of technology:

- ***The sense of urgency facilitated by instant communication options can rob us of the ‘downtime’ needed to stay refreshed and relaxed.***
- ***Unplug regularly. The world doesn’t need you to be on call 24 hours a day.***
- ***Make a special effort to connect with real things—people, animals, nature, music, art, play, laughter and exercise.***



I suspect that those of you who knew Bishop Skogman, can still see and hear him in your minds speaking these words. Are not these reflections from 20+ years ago still powerful and relevant today?

Even more important than recognizing that “we’ve been here before,” is proclaiming in faith, “God has been here before!” Those who have gone before me, and people like Bishop Skogman, remind us to fervently pray for our own faithfulness in response to God’s faithfulness. “To remember” God’s faithfulness in the past is to be encouraged to trust God’s faithfulness for the present moment and for the future. And, it’s yet to seen what new thing our faithful God will be doing in our Northern Great Lakes Synod through people like you!

(In my July/August article for the Northern Lights, I will offer some words from Bishop Thomas Skrenes, the third bishop of the Northern Great Lakes Synod)