



*Now faith is the
assurance of things
hoped for,
the conviction of things
not seen.*

~Hebrews 11:1

Dear Northern Great Lakes Synod,

As this Year of Hope 2021 comes to a close, we shift our focus to Faith for the year 2022. Faith is, of course, connected to Hope as our Faith in the Spirit of the Living Christ is the source of our faith and our hope.

While each generation has been marked by its own challenges, it's hard not to feel like our time in history is somehow exceptional, perhaps because we are the ones who are living it. The past couple of years have certainly been distinctive. We are living in a time of contrasts and simultaneous opposites:

- Weariness and opportunity
- Grief and creativity
- Loss of traditions and forging something new
- Polarization and common mission
- Apart but together

Living in the tension of seemingly opposing forces is exhausting. And yet, perhaps it is only in that in-between space that we are able to move forward, like walking a ridge line, carefully balancing between two valleys that drop steeply to either side. Every step must be calculated and considered to avoid careening down a slippery slope.

I do believe we entered this pandemic thinking that somehow it would end and we would all go back to the way things were. Now, I am thinking that it is not about looking for an end, but rather shifting into a new way of being.

Included in the charges given to a pastor at an ordination is this exhortation:

“So discipline yourselves in life and teaching that you preserve the truth, giving no occasion for false security or illusory hope.”

I do not wish to give illusory hope, encouraging you to hold on for some near or distant day when the pandemic will be over and things will get back to “normal”. The shifting and adapting we are doing now may well be permanent and not just a temporary adjustment for extraordinary circumstances.

As we travel the ridgeline of 2022, I encourage you to join me and the whole synod in a focus on Faith. The whole point of being church, the whole reason God created the church in the first place, was to share the good news of Jesus. When so much of the future remains uncertain, we have this core mission to guide our steps.

For 2022, I believe we will find blessing as we dig into what we believe, why we believe it, and what difference that belief makes to who we are as people trying to follow Jesus, and what it means for how we live in the world. Whether you join a Synod-wide Lifelong Faith Formation class or participate in a small group Bible Study in your congregation or with a group of friends, I ask you engage in a new effort, a new discipline, to deepen your faith, and I promise to do the same. Together, we will walk this narrow path through the tension that 2022 brings and find our way into becoming the future church that God is bringing into being.



Yours in Christ,

Bishop Katherine Finegan