



Dear Northern Great Lakes Synod,

My father was a historian. Often at the dinner table, he would alert us to some historical milestone of the day. He would announce with enthusiasm, “Five hundred years

ago today...” such and such happened. Or “It’s been exactly ten years and four days since...” Sometimes we would have to guess what obscure anniversary was being named, which was always impossible, unless it was our birthday.

So, prepare yourself as now I am going to inflict the same reverie on you. It has been a year, one whole year, since the pandemic became real to our corner of the world. On March 15, 2020, Pastor Jim Duehring was at St. Paul’s in Ironwood celebrating the installation of their new pastor, the Rev. Doug Norquist. And on that same day, practically that same hour, I was at Salem and Zion, Ironwood, celebrating the installation of their new pastor, the Rev. Nicole Hanson-Lynn. After that Sunday, practically overnight, pastors were transformed into video producers, we learned about FM transmitters, Zoom, making masks, and the status quo became anything but quo.

In this past year, what have we learned? What have we lost? What have we gained? God has been at work in this pandemic. I think of the scripture readings that have to do with pruning, with being refined like silver, with being molded like clay in the hands of the potter. I think of God’s promise for new life, for renewal, to be active in us as the Spirit pushes and pulls us as the body of Christ, the Church, into a God-pleasing shape.

No doubt, we have felt the points of pressure, even pain. We can look back over this past year, which has felt much longer than 12 months, and compare then to now. We can look back and take note that this will be our second pandemic Easter, that we will still observe safety protocols and be silent of trumpets. That we still have a way to go before we can declare the pandemic is over. But at this

one year mark, we can look back and see what we have gained.

We have learned how to be more connected in new ways. Our Lifelong Faith Formation classes connected participants and teachers from the Copper Country to the Soo, from Ironwood to Menominee. The current Racial Equity Challenge is doing the same thing. Pastors and leaders slogged through decision fatigue to creatively meet the new challenges. Congregation Councils did the hard work of figuring out safety protocols and what metrics to apply to future decisions of in person worship. I saw congregations equipping parents to teach the faith with take home packets and at home worship. I saw online meetings, zoom coffee hour, email devotions, and hard copy sermons sent through the mail.

You all have been and continue to be AMAZING!!! What a year! What a difficult, trying, tiring, creative, faith deepening, discipleship challenging, grief provoking year of loss and gain. I know I am not the only one who has felt weary, impatient, and sad. But neither am I the only one who has found new appreciation for what makes us Church, the power of community, and how Christ becomes more palpable when we are together.

Looking at both the positives and negatives of this pandemic allows us to look forward with better questions about what our next steps will be. There is newness emerging and a hunger to dive deeply into the things we took for granted before. As we gather for worship again, as we reapply ourselves to ministries that have been neglected, as we are newly aware of what matters to us about the community of faith, I urge that we continue in prayerful discernment about future directions. I do not believe it is wise to rush back to fill every corner with the way we did things “before.”

I hope, in this year of HOPE, that the same care and consideration that we invested in designing safety protocols will be applied as we consider what to carry forward and what to leave behind, and what to begin from scratch. I know that God

is creating something new, and we are only just beginning to perceive it.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Katherine Finegan