

Dear Northern Great Lakes Synod,

I remember my first time going to Bible camp, where the youth of the church and their friends gather for a week of fun, fellowship, learning, and more.

As often happens at Bible camp, the campers were led through a series of team building exercises, one of which was “The Trust Fall.” I would guess many of you have participated in this exercise and even as you read this, you’re remembering your own experience. Did they catch you? Did you fall to the ground? Did you drop anybody?

For those of you unfamiliar with “The Trust Fall,” I give you the following description. Imagine you are standing on the very edge of a picnic table, with just enough of your toes on one end to keep you standing on the table and your heels hanging off the side. You have been instructed that at the moment when you fall back that you are to cross your arms over your chest to keep from flailing wildly and accidentally whacking someone in the face or taking out a fellow camper’s eye. Your heart begins to race as you watch your fellow campers below the table arrange themselves in two lines. They stand facing each other starting from the edge of that picnic table. Their arms are outstretched in a pattern that alternates elbows and wrists, left and right, from each side of the line.

You look down at them at what seems like a very flimsy zippered net of skinny middle school arms. Sure, there’s the camp counselor, but that person is not particularly positioned to catch you. Your fellow campers are supposed to catch you...with their scrawny pre-pubescent arms they’re supposed to catch you. These fellow middle school campers look up at you, and you can see that they’re not so sure about this either. The full magnitude of this action settles into your gut as you realize what this all means, that

you’re supposed to fall backwards from the discomfiting four-foot height of the picnic table into this bony net of weak, angular wrists and elbows, mere ulnas and radiuses, that you’re quite sure will snap and break like dry twigs when your body slams into them.

You have never witnessed a trust fall, and you’re pretty sure that you’re going to get hurt somehow. But the camp counselor assures you that all will be well. You consider stepping off that picnic table, but everyone is looking at you, and you don’t want to be considered a coward. So you steel yourself, cross your arms over your chest, and with grim resolve, face forward. You hear your counselor say, “Ready?” and you reply with a conviction you don’t feel, “Ready!” Fall away!

And through an act of will you let your body fall backward. But really, more accurately, you let go of what’s keeping you upright, you let go of fear and apprehension, you let go of all the reasons not to let go. You let your body fall....and you trust that scrawny net of bony pre-pubescent arms to catch you even as you brace yourself for a spine jarring impact on your tail bone. For a brief, shining, moment, you are airborne. You are in flight. You are weightless, until you feel those scrawny arms catch you, surprising in their strength, their resolve, to care for you, to keep you safe, and not let you hit the ground.

And you are amazed! Euphoric! The adrenaline of that brief act of courage hits you like a wave of joy. You are so relieved...and surprised! Who knew scrawny pre-pubescent arms could work so well together? To catch even a body in free fall? Who knew?

In Hebrews 11:1 we read, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”



For the past two years, in many ways, we have been in freefall...this untethered descent into the space of the unknown, uncertain of our landing, unsure of the damages and unclear how much we can depend on those we need to depend on.

No, the pandemic is not over. No, we have not yet “landed.” Yet, God gives us instructions through Jesus the Christ as to how we should line up in order to provide safety for ourselves and others. One of us, alone, cannot provide the needed support, but all of us together, with combined strength and resolve, can work well together, no matter how ill equipped we might seem. We have Christ’s own assurance, that even though we cannot see the presence of God, God is with us.

Ultimately, in faith, we trust that God will catch us. In faith, we trust that together, we have what it takes to care for each other and keep each other safe. In faith, we are stronger than we know and braver than we feel. In faith, we have received the promise of God’s abiding presence.

We may not ever feel ready, and yet, in faith, by the grace of God, we are blessed to “fall away” and feel the love of God in the many arms of the community of faith that seek to catch us.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Katherine Finegan