

*“In the beginning,  
God created the heavens and the earth,  
the earth was a formless void and  
darkness covered the face of the deep,  
while a wind from God  
swept over the face of the waters.*

*~ Genesis 1:1*

Dear Northern Great Lakes Synod,

Have you ever ventured down the craft aisle of some do-it-yourself store? I remember being given a make your own sand art, make your own paint by number picture, and cross stitch kits with all the embroidery floss included. Maybe you graduated to the kits that brew your own beer or make your own birdhouse or nail together a raised garden bed.

I ordered a baker’s rack once that required assembly. It was very handy to have step by step instructions paired with pictures and arrows, connecting part a to part b. Sure, I put it together wrong a few times before I got it right, but it now stands correctly assembled.

It was easy to begin these projects because I had a guide, instructions, I knew what the finished product was supposed to look like. Beginning was easy because the end was clear.

We know something about beginnings. We begin new jobs, new school years, move into a new house or apartment, welcome a new child, initiate a new ministry. Even without a kit, we know what it is to “start from scratch” when there are no pieces to put together, no foundation already laid, no past to shape the future, no ready-made mix that only needs eggs to make the cake.

Certainly, God didn’t have much to work with “in the beginning.” God has a knack of how to make something from nothing. Such creative success takes a certain divine skill set. It is a God-only talent.

And yet, God shares God’s own creative genius with us. And that is a good thing. Because we as congregations, we as the church, are at the beginning again. We need the creative spirit that only God can give because there are a host of things that are unclear.

**Do we have all the pieces we need?** I say yes. I believe God provides the resources, the people, and the way forward for whatever God would have happen in and through your congregation.

**Are we starting from scratch?** Not really. There is recent and a collective memory of the way things used to be, not only pre-pandemic, but pre-eighties. Whether these expectations, or even hopes, will be a help or a hindrance to new efforts remains to be seen.

**Do we have clear instructions?** I say no. 😊  
This is where we need the collective wisdom of the body of Christ listening intently to the Spirit and finding a way forward together. The goal is not to recreate the church of the past but to lean into the future church that is becoming. The Church is being transformed. Our job is to be faithful in this moment of history that will last years. Keeping the witness of Jesus of Nazareth as the lens through which all else is considered, we can’t go far wrong.

**Are we clear on what the finished product will be?** Maybe a little, but not really. The Church, capital C, is timeless. God will always call people to faith in Christ. The Spirit will

always gather believers together. The Bible will always be treasured and provide an inspiring word to proclaim Christ. But what the Church looks like, how it sounds, where it gathers, the liturgy, traditions, music, language, rhythms, might all be reshaped and reformed. The wind of God is sweeping over the face of the Church. We may not be a formless void, but our shape is being re-formed, slowly but surely, and yet certainly faster than anyone is comfortable with.

As Congregations are investing energy into new or resurrected ministry efforts, we are beginning again in a new set of circumstances. It feels both familiar and foreign. It is both exciting and overwhelming, hopeful and anxious.

I pray God's blessings upon your efforts. You're not creating something from nothing, but I think it can feel like that.

God is with you, inspiring, energizing, and speaking the Word Christ into any darkness, saying, "Let there be...Church!"

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Katherine Finegan