

*⁶I planted,
Apollos watered,
but God gave the growth.
⁷So neither the one who plants
nor the one who waters is anything,
but only God who gives the growth.
⁸The one who plants and the one who waters
have a common purpose,
⁹For we are God's servants,
working together; ...
~I Corinthians 3: 6-9*

Dear People of the Northern Great Lakes Synod,

As we begin the Year of our Lord 2024, I share with you the scripture focus of our Synod for the next three years. The above verse from Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth is an admonition to those who would make a distinction between baptism at the hands of one leader against another, as if baptism ties the newly initiated to the baptizer rather than to the one in whose name we are baptized. Paul asserts that the life of faith is about more than one believer or baptizer, rather all believers are part of the life cycle of ministry; one planting seeds- for the next one to nurture- for the next one to enjoy the growth given by the grace of God, which in turn enables seed planting for future ministry.

Together, all of us are Seed Sowers with a common purpose, and there is blessing in understanding the impact we can have in different seasons of ministry.

For the year of our Lord 2024, we will lean into what it means to "plant." I confess, I do not always have patience for planting. When I have been frustrated at a lack of response for a given effort, I often hear the reassuring word, "but you planted seeds! Who knows how those seeds will bear fruit in the future." While this is true and I am glad to be reminded, I would much rather see the fruits of my labor now.

If only ministry could be more like mowing the lawn! One makes the effort, sees the rows where the grass has been cut and where it still needs a trim, and when it's all done, there is a sense of satisfaction as I can see what has been accomplished. There is an immediate return on the labor and time invested.

So often, ministry is not like this. And yet planting is so important! There is no harvest without planting. There is no fruit of our labor. There is no passing on the faith, teaching, raising up leaders, building relationships in and out of our congregations.

We give thanks to God for the growth we enjoy from seeds that were planted long ago. Each of us has a story to share of who passed the faith on to us and how. Who was it that planted seeds of faith in you? How were they watered? And each one of our ministry efforts began somewhere. Who planted the seeds of your congregation? Of LWR quilts and food pantries? We celebrate that others have laid a foundation for ministry, and still others have built upon it. But only God gives the growth.

This year, as we focus on planting, we not only enjoy the fruits of what others have planted, but we take our turn to plant seeds for future ministry, future generations, future Church. We plant seeds for fruit that we may never see and for a future Church that may be very different from the one we know. Yet we plant, trusting that God will give the growth.

Yours in Christ,
Bishop Katherine Finegan

