

Why stay in the ELCA – biblically, ecclesiastically and theologically? As with most of my responses – my response interweaves itself with all three. I begin first and foremost with scripture. As our congregations worship together using the “Service of Word and Prayer” found in “With One Voice.” I often find myself struggling and stumbling over the text used in the passing of the peace from 2 Corinthians 11:13. It reads from the NRSV, “Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.” As I read these words in our congregation, I often find myself stumbling over the phrase, “agree with one another.” What does this mean for the church? How are we called as a church as a disciple to agree with one another? Why are we called to agree with one another? This does not seem like scripture we practice well in our churches or even the ELCA.

I believe above everything St. Paul uses these words to call the church into relationship with one another. “To agree with one another” in our world, in our church this seems impossible. And yet, I deeply believe that with Christ at the center of our conversations, our thoughts, our lives, all things are possible. So that is it – to agree with one another we must focus ourselves on Christ. To do this, I must not focus on myself, but on my brothers and sisters of Christ. I must work harder and stronger to communicate and keep Christ at the center of everything I do. In doing this, I trust that my brothers and sisters are doing the same. If I leave the church, I struggle with how I am being faithful to my call as a Christian to work together and to listen to one another so that I can work constantly towards St. Paul’s plea “to agree with one another”?

By no means is this an easy calling, yet I realize that being a Christian is far from easy. This leads me to my understanding of the church. I truly believe as a church that we are the body of Christ. Because of this, each of us is different parts of Christ’s body. I constantly find myself striving to work and understand different parts of our body. How can we faithfully work together? I do not want to abandon the body that I am part of. I am proud that the ELCA is one of the top leaders in ecumenical dialogue and I yearn for all Christians to come together despite our own understandings and unite in Christ. Jesus loves us all in spite of our differences. If I were to leave the ELCA, how am I helping to continue this call towards unity?

Theologically, once again I believe that as followers of Christ we are called to community, to unite as one in Christ Jesus our Lord. As a member of the community I must learn to share my voice within the larger body. How do I faithfully express myself within this body? If I were to leave, so would my voice. Jesus never left the synagogue. He continued to faithfully be part of his community, whether it was teaching, preaching or even expressing his frustration and anger for how things were done. He never left it – it was the community that rejected him, not him that rejected the community. He disagreed with their actions and called them on it, but always as a member of the faith of which he was part.

Well, this is my response for right now. It is growing and changing all the time. I pray this letter helps you in some way.

In Christ’s service,

Pastor Wendy Richter