

Dear Saints,

My family and I send greetings from Ontario, Canada, which is celebrating its sesquicentennial- 150 years. Last Sunday we worshipped at Bethesda Lutheran Church in Kenora, which has a century of ministry in the community. My grandfather was pastor there for 5 years during the 1930's depression, and the oldest daughter, my aunt Dorothy married and raised her family there. The old church building is now an art studio after a large new structure was built in the mid-1960's, when the Sunday School was nearly 200 children. The decades have taken a toll, especially when the paper mill closed around 1990. The congregation continued to shrink and young families moved away. Five years ago they sold the building and rent a couple rooms to worship there, currently a gym. The 30 elderly people who worship appreciate their pastor, but are in dialogue to consider a part-time package. While we enjoy visiting with these friends who remember 4 generations of my family, it also makes me sad with nostalgia and challenged in legacy. Perhaps it reflects the truth about seasons of life and faith described in Ecclesiastes 3. And like the lectionaries lessons in July about the parables of the sower and seeds, I can't help praying for future fruits and strong roots.

Many denominations, including the ELCA, are challenged with shrinking congregations and church closures. What a time to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation... but perhaps poignantly apropos. Faith communities should not take their ministries for granted nor the necessity for stewardship and outreach in a changing society. It is what Reformation history is all about! We need to pay attention to where God's Spirit is heading as well the needs of people in our present context.

We're praying for both roots and wings in our faith and ministries. We need to be refreshed not just with knowledge ... but relevant and relatable witness in expressing our faith in actions and attitudes. This year's leadership theme of "Be-Attitudes... Believing, Belonging, Becoming" is the calling in personal ministry for every one of our members of All Saints. Summer recreation is welcomed by us all, as hopefully will be next month's season to rally. Don't take a vacation from your faith ... but let your travels be opportunities to open your eyes, ears & heart to to see parables and expand your witness. This applies even more when we're in the "stay-cation" mode at home!

I look forward to rejoining you soon and let's find the ways to celebrate the Reformation faith in fruitful ways ...

Love in Christ, Pastor Nathan