

Dear Friends,

Someone asked that I print a portion of a recent sermon in this issue of *The Seed*, because it talks about our mission together in the ELCA. What I said on that Sunday went something like this:

“Whether I agree with every decision of the ELCA or not, I know that this denomination is centered around concerns that are important to me. The largest part of the church’s budget is always evangelism and mission. This denomination supports over 200 missionaries in 46 countries around the world. With companion church programs we are present in over 90 countries around the world. We have more ecumenical partnerships with other denominations than any other denomination, period. Together we are starting over 216 new congregations in this country, seven of them within this synod. The ELCA supports ministry with twenty seven colleges and universities, seven seminaries and 145 camps and outdoor ministries. And did you know that the Lutheran hospitals, nursing homes, group homes, counseling services, foodshelves and homeless shelters serve over 6 million people a year in the US and Carribean? That’s one in every 50 people. Did you know that the ELCA pledged a quarter of a million dollars on the day of the earthquake in Haiti for relief efforts there; that it authorized the release of an additional half million dollars beyond that, and that its members have donated an amazing two and a half million dollars to date? 1.25 million in just the first ten days! Lutherans are amazing. And our service agencies combined are larger than the American Red Cross.

So I look at the members and congregations struggling to decide whether or not to leave the ELCA; to go to associations and networks like LCMC, Lutheran CORE, Association of Renewal Congregations; and I do the math. Where are the missionaries, the colleges, the church camps and youth ministries, the new congregations; where are the foodshelves and homeless shelters; where are the seminaries to train and produce new leaders for worship and mission in these other places? Look up these other associations online. See what they have to offer the congregations that belong to them.

It’s clear to me that, if what you care about is evangelism, witness and mission, if what you care about is touching the lives of the poor and the hurting, if what you care about is raising up leaders for the future of God’s mission, then this is the place to be.

Now I’m almost ready to get off my soapbox, but not quite yet. The point is not how great we are, but it’s how strong and vital and relevant we are together. The point is how necessary we are to the world around us and

what a difference we make together. The point is that even though we may disagree with one another about many things, we care more deeply still about the work of God's kingdom in this place and in the world."

To my mind, the ELCA is a mighty fine place for a congregation to be.

God's Peace,

Pastor Martin R. Ericson