

Reformation Sunday
Reformation, Media
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Sixty years is quite a bit of time for most of us – but for a church, it is but a moment. The past few weeks we have been learning about Henry Muhlenberg, so we know that in our own synod we have churches that are over 300 years old. And, I'll never forget the ELCA Ecumenical journey I was part of in 1997. When we went to London to see the Archbishop of Canterbury, I took time to visit Westminster Abbey in London, and as I sat in one of the choir pews, I saw a small brass plaque that said "A worship service has been held here every day for 822 years." Three hundred and 28 years before Luther posted the 95 Theses on the door of Castle Church people were worshipping in Westminster Abbey!

It sort of puts history into perspective and makes us realize that the church is meant to be an ever-growing, ever-reforming but always faithful part of a community's history. Our task, while we are the living guardians of a congregation is to maintain its health and strength; expand and increase its effectiveness in proclaiming and living out the gospel; and serve as a center of ministry for the community; so that it will not only continue to exist and thrive for future generations, but so that those generations will have our legacy as motivation for the continuing ministry of the church.

When I began at God's Love in 1975, I was only three years into ministry. I did not fully understand this larger role that I and the founding members of God's Love were undertaking. I simply knew that as a young pastor, I was being called here to help grow a

new mission. There had been some difficulties in the transition from the previous pastor, Edward McHale, and congregational leadership was upset at the synod.— They even were encouraging members to divert their offerings from benevolence to Current giving. This provided an opportunity for me to help the leaders understand two important principles that have guided my ministry and are marks of outstanding congregations.

I went to council president Harry Weber and I said, “Harry, members can make their own decisions about how to divide their offerings, but I don’t want us to ever discourage giving to benevolence. A congregation that is strong in giving to others will always have enough for itself. We want to encourage benevolent giving and generosity in every way possible. Secondly, I made it clear that we were part of a larger church. Without the support of the larger church we would not be here. Without the strength of the larger church tremendous areas of national and global ministry would be diminished.

Muhlenberg understood this principle back in 1742 when he landed here in Philadelphia and began to organize congregations into the first Lutheran church body. Great congregations are actively involved in the work of the larger church and support the work of the larger church. Even as that larger church supports the congregation in tough times. “A cord of many strands cannot be easily broken,” said Muhlenberg.

These same principles were the basis of God’s Love becoming active in the community and developing visibility so others could see that we were an important part of our

community and might desire to join in that effort. Great churches not only proclaim the gospel on Sunday, but they live it out Monday through Friday.

I brought these same principles to Reformation: Generosity in giving, Passion for Serving, Excellence in worship and preaching and teaching, Compassionate Caring for each other and Joyful fellowship -- These are the foundation stones that we have been putting in place in Media for these past 60 years. Maintaining the focus on such efforts is not always easy, especially in times of leadership transition, but understanding the critical nature of what we are doing can provide a perspective on the ability of congregations to weather the difficult times and return to the tasks for which we were established.

God has placed us here for a reason, and as long as we honor and cherish the ministry that God has given us, here in Media and make that the focus of our life together, then God's Spirit will guide us, and God's strength will empower us and renew us. This is one of the great principles that Martin Luther gave to the church – the active participation of the laity; an understanding that each of us has gifts for ministry that can be used not only to enhance the life of the congregation, but which can be expressed in the midst of our daily vocations to enhance the life of our community and the world.

It is a tradition of mission that was expressed in the efforts of Alyce Thompson and Ruth Kuder and John and Anna Tinsman as they petitioned to form Reformation church. It was in the decision of that early Congregation Council that determined a community need

and established a Nursery School to meet that need. It was the vision of the congregation as they called me as pastor 16 years ago, and I have tried to honor that vision.

There are churches all over Delaware County that are struggling – churches of every denomination. There has been a great decline of church attendance in Germany and Scandinavia, the very birthplace of our Lutheran heritage. I don't pretend to know all of the reasons for the decline. But I do know this – where the gospel is proclaimed with power; where a tradition of mission for the sake of Jesus Christ is at the core of a congregation's life; where members understand their own critical role in the vitality of the church and its message of hope for the world, then a church will live and thrive for three hundred, five hundred or a thousand years.

There are some children here today, who may well be here to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Reformation and help open the time capsule that will have their pictures and other momento's of our era. What we do now will be the heritage they remember and the values that they will pass on. Our ministry today becomes the foundation for their ministry tomorrow. Our ability to overcome the challenges of our time will give them the confidence to face the unknown challenges of the future. Thanks be to God for the confidence our Lord has placed in us – using our frail but willing hands for this great work of the gospel.

Amen.