

Discerning God's Will For the Church

So how do we make decisions? How do we seek to discern God's will for our lives and that of the church?

All Christians I assume would answer we accomplish this through Scripture. In some corners of the church, it is made simpler because Pastor Jack or Pastor Dan tell what the Scripture says...or perhaps it is the leadership group in the church, bearing an assortment of names, explaining the correct understanding. Discernment is easier in such situations...as long as one agrees with what we are told.

Lutherans come with a different bias. We believe that the Holy Spirit opens the Scripture to every individual...that no one individual or group of leaders have the inside corner on interpretation and understanding. Scriptural study in such a setting is more difficult...some would say messier. There can be differences of interpretation and understanding. And so we are driven to deeper study and prayer, to learning from other Christians both present with us as well as those who have shared their confessions before us. It is a humbling experience. It should be anytime we dare to encounter our God.

It also, I believe, more honestly reflects the nature of the early church which the Scriptures share with us. Read the book of Acts...and the letters written by the Apostle Paul. The early church was filled with many voices, all seeking to be faithful followers. And that church was

filled with discussion and differences and even dissension. Being the church was never clean and easy in Scripture. It still isn't.

So we take very seriously the decision making process in our church. And we gather together regularly in our congregations and synods, and on a national level, to seek to understand God's will for us. And we do so always with study and prayer and in relationship with our sisters and brothers of faith. And we make our decisions with a humility that reflects the words of the Apostle Paul, "now we see in a mirror dimly." And in the process, we are driven more to confession and repentance than we are to applause.

Pray for your church in assembly...and pray for those who gather to faithfully seek God's will.

Shalom,



Harold Usgaard
Bishop



Bishop Harold Usgaard

Remember in Prayer: Churchwide Assembly Voters

Here is a sample prayer congregations can use to pray for the Churchwide Assembly:

"Pour out your wisdom upon the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, especially the voting members of the Churchwide Assembly. We pray especially for wisdom and safe travels for the voting members from the Southeastern Minnesota Synod: Bishop Harold Usgaard, Pastor James Ahlquist, Larry K. Anderson, Ward Ask, Pastor Jon Becker, Pastor Stephen Fiksdal, Shirley Gangstad, Pastor Roger Haug, Jonathon Helleckson, BettyAnn Hernke, Pastor John Holt, James

Hunzeker, D. Douglas Johnson, Natacha Kemp, Linda Kraushaar, Virginia Larsen, Pastor Shari Mason, Dr. Ruben Mesa, Pastor Roger Michaelson, Marcia Nagel, Stephanie Quigg, Pastor Judy Reitz, Pastor Margaret Sander, and Cheryse Sloan. Bless their deliberations, guide their decisions, inspire their prayers, that in all they do they may bear witness to the truth of the Gospel so that all the members of your Church may be strengthened and encouraged to serve the peoples of the earth. God of truth, hear our prayer."

(Prayer adapted from www.elca.org.)