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*President Walton's October 2018 Message*

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## *Reformation Hope*



Dear Friends,

Coming off a week of conferences is both exhausting and exhilarating. This past week the pastors and educators had separate conferences back to back in Daytona Beach, and if you have any skepticism or fear for the future of the church let me assure you, first that Jesus is still Lord of the Church, but also

that there is hope for the future in the very ones He has chosen in His grace and love to serve as leaders for His Church. I was blessed by an excellent hope-filled group of laity at the Lay Leadership Summit in August. It's a hope that makes it clear to me that we have a common goal to connect people to Jesus. This hope is predicated on women and men who have a genuine love for Jesus, and a desire to find ways to make a difference in the world for the sake of the Gospel. One take away from each of these conferences is the level of energy and enthusiasm and a commitment to serving Jesus in our world.

Hope is such a necessary and desired thing in our world right now. We need hope, because we live in what some have termed the most divisive time in modern history. There are so many issues that divide us, and people are quicker than ever to take sides and share their opinion, especially in an age when social media predominates how we communicate with each other. There are divisions over politics, over fake news, over gender identity, over the role of men and women, over faith issues and a score of other things that seem to push people farther and farther apart. Every day we hear about new issues that cause divisions, and we wonder if our world can take any more. And, unfortunately, divisions really don't seem to be very different within the boundaries of the church in our time.

Paul, writing to the Ephesian church said, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace." Unity in the body of Christ is not a given. It takes some effort and energy, and a determination to walk together—which is the meaning of the word "Synod." Remember how divided the twelve disciple could be with each other, and these were men who lived with Jesus day in and day out. If divisions could happen among these hand-

picked because Jesus should be surprised that we too will be confronted with divisions? The devil is always at work to divide and conquer, and I am amazed at how often we fall prey to his destructive devices.

While we can't always control the circumstances, we can control ourselves. Paul reminds us that one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. We have a choice in how we will act and react to the situations that confront us, whether as a church worker or a lay leader. James, the brother of Jesus writes: *"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."* James 4:1-3 (NIV). What we often experience as church people isn't new to the church. It isn't something that has appeared in our generation. It's been around from the start, because the devil has been trying to destroy the church from the start. What he knows is the more we get organized and work together we will be a powerful force for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I am convinced that the devil's strategy is simple. He wants to keep us looking at the issues inside the church, dealing with people inside the church, while often failing to see the needs beyond our campus. I believe if he can keep us focused on serving the saved, bickering among believers, then we have no time or energy to reach the lost. It isn't either-or, but really a both-and. We have a responsibility as the redeemed to reach the world with the good news of Jesus. Here is a challenge, the next time a quarrel comes up in the congregation ask yourself how this will serve to connect people to Jesus? Certainly we want to be circumspect in regard to our life and doctrine, but in my experience most of the arguments that divide congregations are either over power or money, or both! In Romans 16:17-20 (NIV), Paul writes: *"I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you."* This seems so harsh, but I suspect that it was among those foundational and pivotal thoughts of the Reformation. Luther was tired of the power struggles and the abuses that hurt those with just a simple faith. He wanted to restore hope. And so today we find ourselves in need of another reformation, one that calls us back to God's Word. We need a reformation that will help us filter all we do as brothers and sisters in Jesus through the lens of the Gospel. God promises that He has plans for us, plans that are not meant to harm us, but plans with a hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11).

As we enter into this month which is filled with celebrations of our faith, things like LWML Sunday, Clergy Appreciation Sunday, and mostly, for us as Lutherans, the Reformation, may God draw us once again to His truth. May He enable us, in hope, to: *"Fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."* Hebrews 12:2



(NIV84) In Him alone is our hope. May we cling to His righteousness and power as we look to the future with trust, and in hope!

With you at the feet of Jesus,  
Greg

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## Upcoming Events

[Middle School Youth Gathering, November 2-4, 2018](#)

[2019 FLGA School Music Festival February 22, 2019](#)

[Veterans of the Cross, March 4-6, 2019](#)



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