



## President Walton's June 2019 Message

### ***Walking in Unity by God's Spirit***



Isn't it amazing that as we enter into the summer, which often corresponds to Pentecost, things seem less active in the Church! Yet, the Holy Spirit came in tongues of fire to energize and activate the Church! This summer will prove to be full of opportunities to grow in faith and life. For some of us, especially in Region 1, there is an opportunity for growth as we hold our Regional Lay Leadership Conference at Faith Marietta on June 7-8. Here lay people from all over region one will have the opportunity to see

how they can partner in ministry for the sake of connecting people to Jesus. In just a couple of weeks from now women from all over the world will gather in Mobile, Alabama for the 38th Biennial National LWML Convention. The Florida-Georgia District is one of the host Districts and a number of us will be attending. That's followed by the National Youth Gathering in Minneapolis, Minnesota in early July. Thousands of youth from all over the United States will converge on the Hyundai Center and celebrate Jesus! We have over 900 youth attending from the Florida-Georgia District with a very special District event. I can't wait to see how God will use all of these events in the life of the people who participate.

Additionally, we are privileged to serve as the host for the 67th Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, July 20-25 in Tampa, Florida. While delegates have already been elected, and preparations have been made, you are welcomed as a guest to come and see a Synod Convention in action, beginning with opening worship on Saturday, July 20<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m. There is a guest section on the Convention floor which requires no registration and you can come and go as you need. It is a fascinating venue to see The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod at work.

It will indeed be a busy summer for many! As I reflect on these upcoming events the one thing these events each have in common is they bring together a wide variety of people from differing backgrounds and walks of life. There will be people of various races, social and economic status, and life experiences. The common denominator for each of these events is that we love Jesus. There are many things that highlight our diversity, but our unity is found in Jesus alone!

The Psalmist wrote, ***“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers [and sisters] dwell in unity!”*** What joy there is when unity prevails in a marriage or family setting. I can tell you from personal experience, having grown up with four other siblings, when unity is not present, it can be a very unpleasant situation. I can still hear my father saying, “If I have to stop this car there are going to be a lot of tears...” The truth is, the same precept holds true for the church. I have been in churches that are divided. Usually it is not over doctrinal issues or issues that impact faith or eternity. Usually it is more honest that it is

about personalities, personal agendas, and strong wills. However, the impact it has on the faith of those involved is dangerous. Jesus said, **“A house divided against itself cannot stand.”** All the while the devil sits back and laughs as he stirs things up to let the church destroy itself.

The Bible has much to say about unity. Paul, writing to the Philippians, said, **“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind”** (Philippians 2:1-2). To the Corinthians, a very un-unified church, Paul wrote, **“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment”** (1 Co 1:10). It just goes to show the effects of sin have plagued God’s church since the beginning. Then as now there is a tendency to think that it’s all about winning. What I’ve seen tells me that sometimes the biggest winners are really the biggest losers. Jesus said, **“What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but forfeits his soul...”** Anyone who is married knows that wanting to be right isn’t necessarily healthy for the relationship. So it is in the church. How often I would see people leave the church, broken and hurt because of infighting and ridicule. Close relationships have been obliterated because we have chosen things that divide rather than choosing to walk together in unity.

Certainly there should not be compromise when it comes to essential things. One time I had placed some prolife literature produced by Dr. Al Barry, former President of the LCMS, in the tract rack at church. A member approached me and wanted to put prochoice material out as well. Of course I said no, and in anger she left the church along with the rest of her family—about six people and that hurt a small mission church. As a young pastor I was heart-broken and felt like I had to defend my action even though no one questioned it. Several years passed and one Sunday the family was back in church. I was surprised but welcomed them with open arms. The issue never came back up. Here’s the point, we stand on truth, but we operate in love. In fact, Paul tells us to speak the truth in love. In fact, Paul wrote to the Colossian Church and said, **“And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”** Love is really the key—beginning with our love for Jesus and a desire to let Him be seen in our lives. In fact, Jesus said, **“By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”** John 13:35.

How we treat one another has an impact on the unbelieving world all around us. So Jesus prays for our unity. In fact, as Jesus was preparing for the events that led to His crucifixion and death, He specifically prayed for our unity. You remember this prayer, often called the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus, from John 17. There He prayed, **“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. The glory that You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, I in them and You in Me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent Me and loved them even as You loved Me”** (Jn 17:20-23). Listen to that phrase once again, “so the world may know...”

What does the world see when they look at the church? What do they see when they look at your church? Jesus calls us to walk in unity and love, not so that we can all gather round the campfire to sing Kumbaya. He calls us to walk in unity and love because we will look different from the world. People notice unity, they notice a church that operates in love, and there are some who long to be part of it. We arrive at this unity as we live in God’s Spirit. I’ve discovered over the years that unity doesn’t just happen. It takes work. In fact, Paul writes in Ephesians 4, **“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace.”** If you want unity, you have to work for it, and even as in the word unity, it starts with you!

In the church the summer months form the season of Pentecost, where we see God’s people grow by the power of the Holy Spirit. No matter how busy your summer may get, I pray that you walk in unity by

God's Spirit, so that as people look at you,  
as they look at your church, Jesus is seen in  
2019.

In the love of a risen Savior,

*Greg*



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#### UPCOMING EVENTS:

- [70th Anniversary Challenge](#)
- [National Youth Gathering](#)
- [LCMS Synod Convention](#)
- [Volunteer Opportunities at the Synod Convention](#)
- [Pastors Conference - Sept. 23-25](#)
- [Educators Conference - Sept 25 - 27](#)