

Bishop's Report 2011 Synod Assembly

The Rev. Dr. L. David Brown was born on February 16, 1926 to Dr. Jon Nicolai and Ada Brown and died on April 2, 2011. He served as the last bishop of the Iowa District and the first bishop of this synod. David is best known for his commitment to racial justice, justice for women, the freedom of Namibia and his work to alleviate world hunger.

His first call was to New Ulm Minnesota. Neither the congregation nor he had enough money to purchase a car. So, he would ride his bicycle around town to visit people and invite them to worship.

He served as the Associate Youth Director of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and then was named as the first Executive Director of the Division of Youth Ministries when the American Lutheran Church was formed. Dave and his creative staff led the church in studies, such as "Called to be Human" and new worship resources. They held the first national youth gatherings, inviting Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to speak at the 1961 gathering. This became so controversial that the District Presidents of the ALC voted unanimously to ask the youth department to withdraw the invitation. Dr. King withdrew in order to avoid a split within the ALC. However, the national bishop, Dr. Fred Shoitz, said that Dr. King should be invited. Dave Brown made the trip to Atlanta and, due to his friendship with Coretta Scott King and his work on a White House Committee to study the integration of children in education; he was able to convince Dr. King to speak at the gathering.

In 1961, he was a delegate to the World Council of Churches Assembly in New Delhi where he was exposed to a depth of poverty and hungry that he had not

seen before. This created a crisis of faith for him and he sent in his ordination certificate in order to resign from the roster of the church. How could there be this degree of devastation and the church simply continued on with business as usual? However, he stayed on the roster but became the executive director for the Freedom from Hunger Foundation where, among other things, he started the Walk for Development program, a program that later inspired the forming of CROP Walks.

He came to Iowa to serve St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Waverly, was elected to serve as the Iowa District Bishop in 1979 and Northeastern Iowa Synod Bishop in 1988. Upon retirement, he served interim calls in the Twin Cities. In some ways, this was a return to his mission development days. It is unusual for congregations to grow during an interim. In fact, it is more likely that there will be a downturn in membership. When he served Central Lutheran in downtown Minneapolis, they experienced growth in worship attendance and membership. I asked him what he was doing that created that unique outcome. "Oh, I'm not doing anything really. Oh, I telephone 50-60 people a night and invite them to worship but I'm not doing anything really." Whether riding a bicycle in his first call or making phone calls because his health did not allow for active visiting door-to-door in one of his last calls, Dave Brown was convinced that people needed to hear of the grace of God that compels them into service of the poor. Those are the words that I believe define him. Grace that grew out of a vital, vibrant piety and life of prayer. Grace that became real for others through acts of justice and mercy.

Beautiful Savior

1 Beautiful Savior,
King of creation,
Son of God and Son of Man!
Truly I'd love thee,
truly I'd serve thee,
light of my soul, my joy, my crown.

- 2 Fair are the meadows,
fair are the woodlands,
robed in flow'rs of blooming spring;
Jesus is fairer,
Jesus is purer,
he makes our sorrowing spirit sing.
- 3 Fair is the sunshine,
fair is the moonlight,
bright the sparkling stars on high;
Jesus shines brighter,
Jesus shines purer
than all the angels in the sky.
- 4 Beautiful Savior,
Lord of the nations,
Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor,
praise, adoration,
now and forevermore be thine!

Grace and Justice. L. David Brown. We give thanks for God's call and for his witness.

That leads me to one of the favorite parables of Americans but is found nowhere in Scripture. "God helps those who help themselves." The problem is that it is a proverb. It is not found anywhere in scripture. God's Word actually says something very different from that in:

- Isaiah 25:4 *For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm,*
- 2 Corinthians 1:9-11 ⁹*Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. ¹⁰He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, ¹¹as you also join*

in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

- 2 Corinthians 5:21 ²¹*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*
- Romans 5:6 ⁶*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*
- Romans 5:8 ⁸*But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

I suppose we can't stop Americans from saying it but we can stop saying it or believing it. Whether Algernon Sydney first said it in 1698 or our favorite deist Ben Franklin said it in 1757 does not matter. It does matter that God's Word does not say it anywhere.

And so we find ourselves hearing God's call and responding with Christ's love in a mission that has a purpose beyond self-preservation or taking care of ourselves but a mission that is about dying to self and sacrificing our self for the sake of others. It is a mission that is in the form of a cross.

The four arms of the cross go in all four directions—to infinity. And that describes the mission of the cross. The mission of this church.

Sometimes it seems that the symbol for faith, religion, and spirituality in our country is a giant belly button upon which we gaze—Navel Gazing—In Curvatem se--Lutke. Feed me. Take care of me. Heal me. Make my life meaningful. Make me successful. Fill me. Please me. Agree with me. Look at me.

Jesus said, "Get behind me Satan for your mind is on the things of humans and not of God." And He said, "Pick up your cross." That can seem a burden but Jesus says it is a burden that is light. It means self-sacrifice that brings attention to the poor, oppressed and in need of mercy and not to me. "Pick up that cross and follow me."

The command comes from the one who first carried a cross—was nailed to a cross—died on a cross—for you, for today, for all of eternity. And, as my pastor says, when someone is willing to do all that for you and me, then says follow, well you do, you just do. He is trustworthy in all that he has done for you. You can trust him when he says follow me.

This weekend you have heard again and again how we follow Jesus:

- To companion synods in Namibia and Hungary;
- To Postville as we work to care for God's people and work for immigration reform;
- To Africa with thousands of malaria nets and we will send thousands from this synod so that thousands of children may live;
- To the towns and villages served by Barnabas Uplift so that people can have jobs and hope, healthcare and hope, substance abuse education and hope.

We follow Jesus together through the ministries of LSI, outdoor ministries, campus ministries, colleges and seminaries.

We follow Jesus together through mission and ministries of the ELCA as Pastor Schock outlined for us:

We follow Jesus into a world broken:

- By sin to proclaim Good News of Jesus Christ;
- At war to speak peace
- In the bondage of oppression to bring justice and freedom.

That is why we recommit once again to “Strengthening Mission.” It is because we follow Jesus. The unifying symbol of His followers is not a giant navel upon which we gaze, it is a cross. Our mission is to preach Christ and him crucified--a stumbling block to some, foolishness to others. We preach Christ and him crucified, the power of God, the wisdom of God. We preach Christ and him crucified and sometimes, as St. Francis says, if necessary we use words.

--Thank Ruth.

--Thank Staff

Mark Anderson
Darrel Gerrietts
Linda Hudgins
Nancy Larson
Charleen Bolte
Marcia Hahn
Linda Sue Hamilton
Karol Simmer

--Intro the Rev. Dr. Stan Olson