

2018 ASSEMBLY SERMON
Bishop Steven L. Ullestad
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There is only one other synod in the church that hosts two colleges of the church, a seminary of the church and a state university with a campus ministry.

Look at the commitment of our ancestors: the Norwegians established Luther College; the Germans formed Wartburg College and Wartburg Seminary; and the University of Northern Iowa was established as a teacher's college for education that grew into a state university. Add in the community colleges on our territory and no one can question our commitment to renewal through education. Frankly, it also brings some tensions.

I was a young assistant to the bishop attending a meeting at our office. A discussion/argument started between a laborer and an academic. It ended when the laborer said very clearly, "There are pastors and teachers and those of us who have to work for a living." There is a lot of pain in that statement.

I worked a lot of laborer jobs to get through college. Some were pretty soft, like selling clothes. Others were not: working for the REC, cleaning pig barns on the farm; general farm labor; and factory work with unregulated chemicals that made me cough all night long.

I honor that statement of the laborer and I have sought to honor those, equally, who have graduated from the “University of Hard Knocks” and from Harvard.

As we celebrate how the church is renewed through education, my hope is that we will celebrate all the ways that we receive education. The academic, yes, but also the learnings of life.

My family moved a great deal. My dad loved to move to a congregation, build a new sanctuary or Christian education addition or a new parsonage and then move again. My life experience taught me how to leave.

Then I married Ruth. Her family has now been on the same farm for four generations. That’s right, four generations. Not many families can claim that.

What does it take to learn how to leave? Or, how to stay? I had a lot to learn. So, about every 3-4 years throughout our 44 years together, I have wanted to move. Ruth’s solution, “Why don’t you go trade cars?” So, I do and it works.

I needed an education on how to stay. On why that pew is sacred because we have sat together for baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals and it is a holy space.

Why do we go slowly on changes? Because these are our neighbors, family and friends. We all need to make these changes together or they will not happen, regardless of votes that win.

So, finally, we turn to the sacred texts. From Proverbs we read: We do not forget God's teachings. They are handed on from generation to generation. We seek not to be wise in our own eyes but live in fear or awe of the Lord.

In Psalms we read: God's Word is a lamp to my feet and a light on my path.

I Corinthians says: We seek the mind of God.

And, the Gospel reading says our unity is in Christ so that we demonstrate with one another the love of God, the love of Christ and the love of one another.

We teach one another from one generation to the next with academic degrees or without. Living in the fear/awe of God. Guided by the Word of God, the lamp of our journey, seeking the mind of Christ and celebrating the unity of Christ. We teach and we learn. And we are renewed.

Amen.