

# *Ottawa-St Lawrence - Conference Connection*

Sunday, March 14, 2010

## **Pastors and/or Congregational Chairperson**

WOW 2010! It sometimes amazes me that the human race has made it this far without annihilating itself. As a young pacifist in the 1970s, I wondered if the USA and USSR really had enough nuclear armaments to destroy our planet. At that time, I seriously wondered if we would experience WW3 before I would ever see 50 years of age. I am proud to announce I celebrated that milestone on February 10, 2010.

How I identified myself back in the 1970s is very different from how identify myself today. Sociologist Robert Bellah says that "the human race is just too vast for us to know who we are by simply belonging to it." He goes on to explain that In order to establish our identity, we have to identify ourselves as being part of a subgroup and its that identification that has to teach us who we are, beginning with teaching us who we are not. For example, I am a male, not female. I am Canadian, not European or Asian. I am Christian, not Jewish or Muslim. Realizing who I am not helps me to understand who I am. Consequentially, when we associate our identity with something like a sports franchise, we will find ourselves grieving their loss when they are moved to another city. When we associate ourselves with a religions group or denomination we may also find ourselves affected by the accomplishments and inner turmoil experienced by that group.

We often identify ourselves based on values that have been passed down to us through our biological families. As such, I identified myself with the French Roman Catholic church until I broke away in the mid 1970s. It was easier for me to identify with the scientific world of tangible facts and figures. Today, having made a "leap of faith," I am now a Lutheran pastor and I identify myself with the ELCIC, although I may not necessary agree with everything which defines the ELCIC or being a "Lutheran."

Religious divisiveness begins when we identify ourselves with those who equate religious claims as truth; as statements of fact. As such, we reduce faith to simple mathematical equations which have only one right answer and many wrong answers. If we say we have the truth, then everyone different from us is wrong. There is no middle ground. We either believe that Jonah was in the belly of a fish – or not. We either believe that God became flesh - or not. We either believe in the resurrection from the dead - or not. When we identify with a truth, when we believe we hold the only truth, when we believe other peoples' truth makes them parochial, narrow-minded, or self-righteous, THEN we need to look at the truth with which we identify ourselves in order to see that we are not parochial, narrow-minded, or self-righteous.

Religious divisiveness creates negative ripples in the life of the church. This tension keeps people from seeking God. People don't want to identify themselves with religious/denominational factions who are arguing. People also want to distance themselves from organized religion because they see it as the voice of our consciousness, and that ultimately makes us uncomfortable. Maurice Samuel said it apply - "no man loves his alarm clock." Some picture a God who can hardly wait to catch us making a mistake. This reminds me of my first driving test (16 years old) when the examiner told me to drive the car in reverse, at walking speed along a long curve. He then opened his door, said I was too far from the curb and failed me.

There are times we resent religion for telling us that what we are doing is wrong. We feel the same way about our doctor telling us that our eating or drinking habits are not good for us. As preachers of God's Word, our challenge is to proclaim God's grace (Gospel) while calling people to a higher, more demanding moral (LAW) without sounding judgemental. Rev David Heney writes "telling the truth must be as clear and direct as possible. We do our followers no favours by sugar-coating or shading the truth." So how are we to teach right and wrong without coming across like the Blue Meannies portrayed the Beatles movie - "The Yellow Submarine" – those dour, life denying characters whose only pleasure is saying no to everything that sounds like fun. More than once, I've had members of my own churches say they don't want to go to a church to hear law or judgement. They want to come to church on Sunday morning to "feel good".

I believe a solution must begin with understanding how and with whom we identify ourselves with.

The writer of Psalm 146 identifies with a God who is the creator, holder of truth and executer of justice. S/he sets the tone for how we should identify ourselves as Children of God. If we are to identify with Christ (first born of children of God), as the lover of those who do good, maybe we need to distance ourselves from all those man-made identifications like catholic, Christian or Lutheran. Maybe this was St Paul's meant when he wrote "there is no longer Jew or Greek, servant or free....for all are one in Christ" (Gal 3:28).

Our primary goal should be to teach people to be Christ-like, beginning with feeling good about themselves. Identification as children of God begins with repentance, as Rev David Heney declares "Jesus forgives so we might learn from our mistakes, grow deeper in faith, and develop stronger character." Robert Bellah writes that "those unsure of their identity tend to give up declaring 'what's the point of trying, nothing ever works out anyway.'" It's this harsh, judgemental identification which focuses on faults and criticism that keeps us away from God. Those who identify with Christ, report sociologists, "have demonstrated a tendency to be more generous, more forgiving, less defensive about their mistakes, more willing to change and better able to cope with problems." These people believe in their capability to become better and grow in faith because of their identity in Christ.

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus, the Christ

### **Conference Council**

Rev Annette Smith, Dean	Rev Marc Lapointe, Secretary-Treasurer
Bianca Tessier, Seaway Cluster Representative	Bob Pierce, Ottawa Cluster Representative
Rev Charles Nolting, Valley Cluster Representative	Rev Samuel King-kabu, Montreal Cluster Representative

### **Conference ELW**

The Conference ELW met twice this last year in what seems to be developing as a retreat atmosphere. We conducted business in the morning and then after lunch we moved into Bible Study and from that directly into a closing communion service. The participants left praising our Father. We will meet on April 17<sup>th</sup> at Zion in Pembroke under the theme of Food for the Body and Food for the soul.  
Join us 0900 to see what this day can bring you.

### **Spring Business/Programme meeting of OSLConference**

**Date: April 24, 2010**

**Location: St Peter's Lutheran Church Ottawa**

*Celebrating their 100th anniversary*

Please Note: If your congregation is sending more than one representative to the Conference meeting, please decide in advance which lay person will be the voting delegate. All ordained clergy holding membership in a conference church and one lay representative may vote.

### **Important business items to be discussed**

Election of twelve clergy delegates to represent OSLConference at 2011 ELCIC Convention  
Election of Seaway and Montreal Cluster Representatives  
Election of Secretary-Treasurer  
First Reading of OSLConference Bylaw - April 2010 (attached)

### **IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER IN THE OSLC AND EASTERN SYNOD**

- April 17, 2010 OSLConference ELW Spring Meeting at Zion, Pembroke
- April 17, 2010 Global song choir Inshallah at St John Lutheran, Montreal
- April 24, 2010 OSLC Spring meeting at St Peter's Lutheran Church, Ottawa
- June 24-27, 2010 Eastern Synod Convention, Toronto
- Aug 19-22, 2010 National Youth Gathering, London
- TBA OSLC-ELW Fall meeting (to be determined at the Spring Meeting)
- Sep 8, 2010 OSLConference Council meeting at Faith Lutheran, Ottawa
- July 14-17, 2011 National Convention of the ELCIC in Saskatoon

Peace, Love and Joy of Christ

Rev Marc Lapointe  
OSLC Secretary-Treasurer