



Word of Thanks...

This is the season in which gratitude is most often expressed: for harvest, for a beautiful fall, for life. I want to add my thanks to you for your support during what is for many of you challenging times. The good work we've done together for many years continues through your support, in both prayer and finances. Thanks.

Death of Civility

The Today Show recently ran a series of stories on the death of civility. It lifted up email, blogs, and the lack of accountability for what one says as commonplace in our society... and for the worse. In theological terms, ***it could be framed as the death of the eighth commandment***: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. Martin Luther encouraged us to speak well of our neighbor and explain their actions in the kindest possible way, rather than cutting, ripping, and tearing our neighbors to pieces.

Over six years ago, a congregation seeking moral guidance asked a synod assembly if our church, the ELCA, could create a document to help us think through the moral implications of our new abilities in the area of genetics: human, animal, and plant. We have powers never available to previous generations. We all know that with power come both opportunity and responsibility. A churchwide assembly agreed that such guidance could be helpful to the church, especially to those who live and work in areas surrounded by genetics.

The third draft of this proposed statement has been discussed at two different hearings in our synod; one at Gackle, the other at Adams. The feedback from these two forums has been received by the taskforce charged with creating the statement. As a result of these hearings, the taskforce spent nearly a full day processing feedback from farmers in Eastern North Dakota.

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A lot of things are being said about the draft, many of them by people who have never read the document. Many conversations I have had are with people who have only read two editorials in a regional farming publication, these editorials have not been faithful to the proposed statement. I have and will continue to encourage people to read the entire draft before forming an opinion about it. One of our area farmers, upon seeing an editorial about the document was very angry, but after reading the actual document told me that he had changed his opinion and felt that the draft was actually pretty good.

As Lutheran Christians, we have always held that our vocations, our callings from God to serve and love one another in God's world are important. Some are saying that the church should have nothing to do with how our farmers live out their vocations. The first commandment in the Bible is to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it. Those who have been called to care for the land know the value of being faithful stewards, not only for the present, but for future generations as well. ***Our faith has to extend and permeate our lives beyond one hour a week on Sunday.*** That being said, ***the church is not going to tell farmers what they can or can't plant. The church isn't going to tell doctors what they can or can't do.*** Yet in this new era of amazing power in the area of genetics, it is helpful for people of faith to be in conversation with each other to help us steward and create the best possible future for all of God's creation.

My request: Please take time to read a document before you criticize it. Please do not jump to assuming the worst in others. Let it not be said that we added to the death of civility. Let the Church of Jesus Christ model the love, care, and concern for each other that Jesus did. In so doing, our lights will shine in this darkness.

The proposed draft statement can be read at: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements-in-Process/Genetics.aspx>

Thank you,



Bishop Bill Rindy, *Eastern North Dakota Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

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