

Bishop Smith's reflections—March 15, 2016



As our congregations and leaders are on the cusp of both the blessedness and the busy-ness of Holy Week, I'd like to forego attempts at profundity and simply share some factual information with you.

This is particularly in response to dozens of visits to congregations during my first seven months as bishop during which I continue to encounter relatively major misinformation about being part of the NC Synod during times of conflict, transition, call process, etc. Some of it I didn't know at all before serving in this office, so perhaps some of these bullet points will come as a surprise to you as well.

Opinions are something I can't change, but I can clarify truths and processes that help us to better walk together as a synod. I'll call this column, which may recur from time to time, "Synod Myth-Busters."

- I am no more "the synod" than you are. Our Church has three expressions: congregation, synod, and church-wide expression, and every member of every ELCA congregation is by default a member of all three.
- Interim pastors, of which there is a severe shortage right now, are appointed by the bishop in consultation with the Congregation Council. I can't tell you the number of congregations that insist on three names for their potential interim, interview each of them and hear them preach, finally "choose" one who is no longer available three months after they originally interviewed him/her, and then complain to "the synod" that the call process took a ridiculously long time. See p. 4 of the [Call Process Manual](#).
- Half of the candidates graduating from our seminaries the past five years are women. We have a severe shortage of clergy that is going to get much worse in the next few years. If you are in a call process and we bring you your first three names, odds are one or more will be female.

One of the saddest and most surprising revelations to me as a new bishop is that the majority of congregations in the call process with whom I've had conversation have expressed to me that they'd rather not or "will not" have a woman. In our polity, since I'm not a Methodist bishop, you get to choose. But if this is an unfortunate and puzzling "filter" in your process, be prepared for the process to take a long time—maybe a VERY long time.

Reminder: Our truly amazing Presiding Bishop happens to be a woman. "But," you say (as at least three congregations have to me), "we had a woman once and it didn't go well." To which I, in all three situations, was able to reply, in all honesty, "Perhaps. But look at your male Pastor So-and-So before that who really split this congregation in two. Given your logic of gender-based pastoral problems, I'm discerning that I should never give the names of any men to your call committee." Am I clear? When we give names we expect you to evaluate pastoral and other rostered candidates on merit and pastoral fit, not gender.

We'll continue "Synod Myth-Busters" in another month or two. A blessed Holy Week to you.

In Christ,

Bishop Timothy Smith



North Carolina Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.