

Response to the Election

There are so many things one could say at a moment like this that it's difficult to know the best place to begin. First of all, let me convey to you how heartwarming it is ... and also a little frightening ... to receive the confidence of the voting delegates to this convention. I did not hope for this office. I did not take the initiative to encourage anyone to submit my name. God Himself can testify how taken aback I was to read the report of the number of nominations I had received from across the country. I have also prayed to Him on a daily basis for many, many weeks that He should block my way and move our people to choose somebody else if that was His will for our Synod. As far as I am personally aware, this election was not marked by the sort of partisan politics which advances one candidate by discrediting another, something that has become commonplace in many churches these days, including some who are very dear to us. That fact fills me with gratitude to the Lord and sanctified pride in the people of the Lutheran Church—Canada. It also makes your decision all the more compelling. For these reasons I now embrace this outcome as God's answer to my prayers and the prayers of other people, and I accept the election with which you have honoured me.

Long ago, my godly teachers at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis trained me to be a pastor and a preacher. I expected that kind of ministry to take up the working energies of my life. I've got a bit of a problem now, because I still feel like that young Swedish clergyman described in Bo Giertz's book, *The Hammer of God*, who asked his superior one day, "Sir, can there be anything greater than to be a pastor in God's church?" I already feel a certain grief in having to bid farewell to that part of my life, and there will be special pain later this summer in saying goodbye to the people of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Kitchener, whom I have served for more than fourteen years. I would imagine that you, President Mayan, and all the brothers on the Council of Presidents felt this same grief yourselves when you passed this threshold, and it will be a comforting thing to hear how the great Lord of the Church brought you through it.

For whatever else you may be able to say about your new President, it will become clear in short order that he's facing a steep learning curve. Trying to link my name with concepts like "CEO" is going to be like trying to mix grapefruit juice with motor oil, at least for a time. The patience and kindness of our people in Synod's office, in all the District administrations, in our treasured seminaries and university college, and in local congregations and parsonages is a gift I

will need badly. And I plead with you to beg God's help for this new work of mine in your prayers time and time again.

Our Lutheran Church—Canada is a small family, comparatively speaking. In His wisdom God decided to give us our home in a land that is almost unbelievably vast. In addition, our task is huge because the Canadian people are growing more secularized, it seems, with each passing year. In many ways, we face a disturbing landscape where many Christian groups seem determined to let go of the apostolic Good News and of the Holy Scriptures as the source and norm of Christian teaching. And let's face it. At times our own willingness to affirm that Gospel and those Scriptures without immersing ourselves in them, our own slowness and half-heartedness in many things, have hampered our way as much as any resistance we ever felt from the outside.

Jesus' own promise, recorded by St. John to the church at Philadelphia, is desperately needed by you and me, by all our pastors and people: *"I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept My word and have not denied My name"* (Revelation 3:8). The Philadelphia Christians didn't get to live in a world any more welcoming than ours. They likely were not the big movers and shakers of their society any more than we are in 21st century Canada. But where churches have and love the Good News of Jesus Christ, as we have it and have come to love it; where churches live among men and women who need God's Son and the rescue He brings; in other words, before churches like ours, God has surely set an open door nobody can shut. May He forgive us all those days when we wouldn't walk through some wide open portal He set before us! May He give us a heart something like His own great caring heart, which beats with concern for people literally dying to have His compassion. May He shape everything we say and do with a love for His Christ and the Scriptures which testify of Him. May He fill us with deep gratitude at having a place in this family we call the Lutheran Church—Canada, so that we to try spread around in our congregations, among our pastors, deacons and other workers, the kind of love that makes the burdens of this time more bearable and refreshes our spirits in the service of Jesus.

"I know you have little strength, yet you have kept My Word and have not denied My Name." "I know," He says. That's where the comfort comes from. It all comes from this One Who tells you and me, "I know." I know your limits, your falls and failures. I know how the faithless world distorts much of what you say and labels your attitudes in a way that's hurtful.

But I also know the blood-bought love I poured into you long ago on Skull Hill, where I laid down my life for the redemption of the fallen human race. I know the gifts and graces you have, even though you often do not see them. I know you have a great capacity to show love and to speak the Good News into thirsting hearts. I know every bit of your story. And because I know, you have what you need.

Dear friends in this room and throughout the Synod, I will be leaning very hard on that promise as I take up the work you have asked me to do. I need you to lean hard that way, too. To the glory of Christ, and for the eternal well-being of many people, I hope that whatever years we work together in this way will turn out to be rich time well spent. God bless you, one and all.

Robert Bugbee
Pastor