

*From the Vice President of
the La Crosse Area Synod*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Never Alone.

True Confession: Over a span of about three years, I uttered these words many times in desperation and exasperation as mother of three young children. When every moment seemed to demand something else from my being, I only wanted one thing—to be alone! As an added dimension, I am an introvert, and these two words can push me into a panic.

What are your initial reactions to these two words?

As the body of Christ gathered at synod assembly, we recognize the seasons of our lives and the rhythms of our days that move us back and forth between solitude (a place to nurture, listen and trust the Holy Spirit that lives within each of us) and community (a place to also nurture, listen and trust the voices of the Holy Spirit that speak through others)—each seeking to flow beautifully in and out of each other and because of each other.

Our hope for this assembly is that through these two easily-memorable words, “Never Alone,” we claim the promise that Christ accompanies us on all our moments—a presence which is marked by signs of gracious invitation and lovingkindness.

In our more joyous moments of life, we may find these words easy to proclaim and believe. Yet how do these words live in us when life takes some deep, dark turns when loss and sorrow appear to have set up residence in our life?

When in your life have you felt most alone?

Nearly three years ago, my friend, Jenny, was diagnosed with cancer. One of her initial fears was that a potentially long treatment journey might tire people, and she would be left alone (*She was an extrovert!*). With those words echoing in my heart, I promised to myself that I would do my best “to be there” in ways that she needed. Over 18 long and difficult months, many people stayed beside her and she witnessed the incredible power of God’s presence through loving friends.

When in your life have you felt God’s presence?

When in your life have you been God’s presence?

For a myriad of reasons, we all know, to some degree, feelings of alone-ness . They invade many moments of our lives, and, for some, the feelings are overwhelming, debilitating and, potentially, life threatening. In February, our school community faced deep loss and grappled with the deep and abiding feelings of alone-ness when a 10th grader took his life, citing “bullying at school” in a letter he wrote before his death.

Who is alone?

How is God calling us to be God’s presence in their lives?

As I connect “Never Alone” with Scripture, I am drawn to the story of Jesus’ crucifixion and death. In his final hour, we witness how our God through Jesus shared our human condition. Jesus both named the alone-ness—“My God, my God why have you forsaken me,” AND proclaimed the

promise of never alone—"Today you will be with me in paradise." In these crucifixion moments, Jesus the Christ experienced both seemingly contradictory (but maybe not) realities.

Jenny's cancer diagnosis turned terminal 11 months into treatment. One month before her death, I wrote, "And when you go where I cannot follow, we rest in the promise that Jesus is with you in ways that we cannot even begin to comprehend." In death, and maybe even especially in death, we proclaim, "Never Alone." There is no where our God does not and will not go.

It is good for us to be together at this synod assembly gathering:

- As individuals, we are reminded that there are others who have experienced similar pain and sorrow...and, of course, joy! What consolation can we bring each other?
- As congregations, we are reminded that we belong to each other as the La Crosse Area Synod. What are we doing together that is more than we can do alone?
- As a synod, we are reminded that our synodical expressions gives way to another ever-widening circle as the La Crosse Area Synod belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). What are we doing together that is more than we can do alone?
- As the ELCA, we are reminded that we stand with other church bodies around the world. What are we doing together that is more than we can do alone?
- As children of God, we celebrate Holy Communion and the circle widens yet again as we gather with the saints who have lived in all times—past, present, and future—and places. How can we ever be alone?



Gathered together and prayerfully mindful of our connectedness, let us share and listen to our stories...

*How do our daily, ordinary acts of faithful discipleship
make a difference across ever-widening circles?*

When we leave each other after this assembly, may Christ's command and promise dwell in us...

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.
And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Matthew 28: 19-20

Your Sister in Christ,
Lori Toso
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