

## Chapel Message – September 2, 2011

*“Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all the things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” (Luke 24:13-16; The road to Emmaus)*

I love this story. I love the picture that it paints. I love that it is a powerful metaphor of the world in which we find ourselves today; a world that is moving from yesterday to tomorrow whether we are ready for it or not. This story is a powerful metaphor for both you as students and for Bethany as a college.

We have two disciples on the road having left Jerusalem walking to Emmaus. Along the way, they meet the resurrected Jesus, though they do not recognize him.

For me, Jerusalem represents the nostalgic past, “the good ol’ days,” what and how it used to be. On the other hand, Emmaus represents the future to which God is calling us and the Road is where we are today in an unprecedented environment of discontinuous change.

For you as students, you are on the road having left behind Mom & Dad and high school friends, traveling this road called Bethany College to your Emmaus: your calling in life. For Bethany, we too are moving from a celebrated past to an exciting future. Like your life, the life of Bethany is changing rapidly.

One example, which I’d like to focus on today, is the change in our relationship as a college of the church. By this, I mean, our Jerusalem as a college of the church was about 50 years ago when Bethany received 20% of its revenue from the church. The ministry of Bethany and the ministry of the Augustana Lutheran Church were unquestionably intertwined. On the other hand, last year Bethany received from congregations, synods, and the ELCA about \$80,000. By contrast, that represented less than 1% of Bethany’s total revenue. During that same year, last year, Bethany College awarded slightly more than \$1.2 million in scholarships to our Lutheran students.

So as we walk the road to Emmaus, at what point does the hard question get asked, “Are we still a college of the church and does the church still have a college?”

If it is all about money, then let’s admit it and let our church-college relationship follow the path of other denominations. Bethany College can easily become historically Lutheran.

For me, however, I believe our relationship is about more than money. I’d prefer to lead Bethany and our church partners into a conversation that discerns a new model where Bethany and the church re-imagine a shared ministry. To that end, Central States Synod Bishop Jerry Mansholt and I are currently forming a task force to do just that: re-imagine a shared ministry between the Central States Synod and Bethany College. Furthermore, I’m part of a wider ELCA task force with six other ELCA college and university presidents who are committed to the same re-imagining at the churchwide level.

Today, I’m here to invite students, faculty, and staff to join me on the road to Emmaus. I don’t know exactly where Emmaus is other than it’s down the road. I don’t know how long it will take us to get there. I don’t know if the journey will be smooth or difficult. But I’m looking for others who would like to walk with me to Emmaus, to a new relationship of Bethany College to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. A relationship that is full of God’s surprises and of sharing.

Here are some possibilities, to get you thinking.

- Bethany and the church could partner in global ministry through companion synods sending mission teams of alumni, students, faculty, and staff alongside church volunteers; or partner to provide scholarships for students from those companion synods to study at Bethany.

- Or, we could partner in social ministry through Lutheran Social Services that might include internships or experience-based education for students.
- Or, we could work together in youth ministry to develop our middle school, high school, and college youth in missional leadership for a missional church.
- Or, we could partner with Lutheran Disaster Response to offer alternative spring breaks or fall breaks.
- Or, Bethany could provide staff and/or chaperone's for high school or middle school youth gatherings or even the ELCA's National Youth Gathering.
- Or, between the Synod, individual congregations, and Bethany, we could offer more scholarships to students attending Bethany.
- Or, Bethany and the church could seize the evangelical opportunity presented by Bethany's approximately 30% of students who self-identify as "no preference" in denominational affiliation.

OK, here's the altar call. Here's the specific invitation to join me. On Friday, September 30 and Saturday, October 1, at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Wichita, the ELCA will be hosting a Glocal Mission Gathering to equip participants for God's work in today's global and local realities as well as their "glocal" intersections. This day-and-a-half event will center on mission conversations around the realities of the world we live in today. For example,

- Enhance your connections with the worldwide Christian family
- Gain practical skills for mission
- Engage in current intersections of mission, migration, and immigration
- Give, receive, and serve more effectively
- Discover how changes in the world are transforming the way churches like the ELCA proclaim and serve
- Travel internationally in a way that is effective, sustainable, respectful, and cross-culturally sensitive

I have reserved and paid for five spots to this event. I can do more. That would be wonderful! If you are interested in learning more, just Google, "ELCA + GLOCAL" and that should take you to the website. If you're ready to commit, email me at [president@bethanylb.edu](mailto:president@bethanylb.edu).

The possibilities and opportunities are endless, if Bethany College and the church are willing to share the road to Emmaus together.

In the end, like the two disciples, I don't think it's as important or really matters as much where we are or where we're going. What is absolutely important for the journey is that we meet Jesus – and recognize him – on the road.

For me, in the context of Bethany College as a college of the church, we are leaving behind the way it was – the church stewarded Bethany – and heading toward the future – Bethany stewards the church. However, only when we meet Jesus together on the road to our shared future will we finally know what that means.

Amen.