

I Peter 5:1-4 - 2013

Elders

Every once in a while I have spoken on what the Association of Free Lutheran is all about. I decided I would do so today. We need to be refreshed on this matter and it is good for others to know there is a difference, even a big difference, between ourselves as a church body and a congregation.

I do not wish to brag or draw attention to myself but I have served the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations we call it the AFLC – I have served on the schools corporation and on the school board as well as the secretary of the AFLC with Pastor John Strand. So maybe I know something about it!

In the AFLC, we hold that the local congregation is the right form of the Kingdom of God on earth. This is the first and foremost of what we in the AFLC call the “Fundamental Principles.” We believe that no human authority can dictate to the local congregation and tell it what it must do. Pastors are called “Servant Pastors” in that they are to strive to do everything possible for the benefit of the local congregation. If you would like a copy of the Fundamental Principles, I can send it to you via e mail using dgray@wiktel.com.

We also note that in our national conferences that no resolution can be binding on the local congregation. Resolutions made are suggestions to the local congregation and are just that, suggestions.

At our conferences, there are some really powerful and interesting discussions. It is good for the corporations and their members and officers to get input and idea. It is good for members of our congregations to be in attendance at these conferences held usually in June – except this year the plan is to meet in August, Lord willing – meeting at the Association Retreat Center in Osceola, Wisconsin.

One thing about the annual conferences, unlike a number of other church bodies, is that the conference is a spiritual retreat. Sessions begin with devotions and end with the entire conference in prayer. Often the president of the AFLC will ask for someone to pray – this is how the Lord leads. (It is to be the same in the local

congregation) Our annual AFLC meetings are called conferences not conventions. We are not gathered exclusively to do business, we are at the Annual Conferences for the spiritual side of things, for the fellowship together.

One thing – important – is that no congregation can violate the teachings of the Bible. Congregations can be removed – or asked to be removed – if they teach things which go against scripture. It is the same with Pastors. Violating the teachings of the Word of God is not something to be tolerated. This is through the action of the Coordinating Committee which does the work of the Annual Conference when it does not meet.

Also, congregations must adhere to the teachings of five creeds: Apostles Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed, the Small Catechism, and Augsburg Confession. Some want to include what is called the Book of Concord. That is fine but with reservations.

Congregations can have their own order of service, use hymnals that they wish to use – the AFLC has a wonderful hymnal called the Ambassador Hymnal and many congregations use this hymnal. Pastors can wear clerical colors if this is okay with their congregations and they can wear robes if that is what their congregations will allow.

The AFLC does not have a delegate system. In a synod delegates can vote away congregational choices. This cannot and will not happen in the AFLC. Any member of an AFLC church may attend and vote. Visitors who support the AFLC may also attend and vote when cleared by the Coordinating committee.

All registrants at an AFLC Conference are eligible to vote. The keeps mischief from the conferences and out of the AFLC! No one group can force issues on the AFLC.

As I see I Peter, I see that in this chapter five Peter is advising the elders of their personal responsibility to the congregation. The elders – like our church council – and other leaders – are to be witnesses of the way a Christian should live and lead.

1 Peter 5:1 (NIV)

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed:

Paul finally speaks to the elders here in I Peter. These men were the leaders of different congregations in Asia Minor. Peter is humble as he writes to them. He says he is a fellow elder. He is equal to the other elders. He also writes that he was a witness of Christ's sufferings. He also says that he with them will share the glory at Jesus second coming. Probably, he did not know these leaders and he did not know where these congregations were located and he is not addressing any one particular congregation or group of elders.

In our Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, our first principle states that we believe the local congregation is the right form of the Kingdom of God on earth. Our congregations are not under in what we call "ecclesiastic ruler ship." No one can dictate the direction a congregation should go.

The officers of the AFLC – president, vice president and so on cannot dictate anything to the local congregation. When a congregation wants to call a Pastor, the president supplies a list of men who might consider a call.

A fellow Pastor wrote on facebook what happened in his congregation – on one Sunday morning – One person said they did not like the hymns/songs picked out and another said that they liked them.

These kinds of things are normal in most congregations. The Pastor is the worship leader and usually picks out the hymns/songs according to the message the Lord leads for that Sunday. (I like the Singspiration idea – since people can make choices he may not make. It adds to the worship time.

What is important that the local congregation follow the Word of God and is led by the Holy Spirit?

Our theme verse is found in II Corinthians 3:17 which reads:

2 Corinthians 3:17 (NIV)

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

Congregations which are part of our fellowship – as well as individual Pastors, Missionaries, teachers and so on must subscribe to the freedom we have as we follow the leading of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.