

MESSAGE FOR SOMD LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE/ 10-24-15

NIV= 'A dwelling for my Name' [1:9]

The Message= '...put them back in the place I chose to mark with my name'

Names are important. We all have one, even two, even three. My wife was born and raised Roman Catholic, but her parents inexplicably did not give her the names of saints or people in scripture. Jill Diane Maute is her birth name. When she was baptized, bestowed upon her was the name Mary. When she received her First Communion, bestowed upon her was the name Elizabeth. When we were married on September 9, 1978, bestowed upon her was the name of Powell. Sooo, my wife's full name is Jill Diane Mary Elizabeth Maute Powell. Needless to say, I've never purchased a monogrammed sweaters nor blouse for my wife to wear. JDMEMP--- That's a lot of letters to include!

Names are important to God...we read in Genesis 2:19/ *'Now the Lord God had formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would **name** them...'* My late father always said to me as I were leaving the house: 'Remember your last name'. That was a reminder to me that names are important. Soon-to-be fathers and mothers spend hours and dollars in search of just the perfect name for their yet-to-be-born daughter or son. That's important, for what they decide is what people will call that individual for the rest of their earthly lives. I read that, recently, these names have been given by parents to their newborns: FaceBook, Hashtag, Moon Unit, and...a father and mother who are rabid fans of the NFL's Seattle Seahawks, named their daughter Cyndee Leigh 12th Mann after the Seahawks cheering sections. These poor kids!

The late W.C. Fields once said: *'It ain't what they call you, it's what you answer to.'* I don't know about you, but I have been called more things since the ELCA decision of August of 2009 than I care to count...Even more names since this congregation voted to join The North American Lutheran Church back in January 2011! I chose not to answer to any of these names. Back to W.C. Fields, *'It ain't what they call you, it's what you answer to!'*

We each have individual names and we have names we share:
Congregations of The North American Lutheran Church...individual clergy,
leaders, and members of The North American Lutheran Church...The Southwest

Ohio Mission District. Add to that what Jesus calls us, as recorded by St. John: *'I no longer call you servants...instead, I have called you friends.'* [15:15] Were that not enough, we read in 1 Peter 2:10/ *'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.'*

That last phrase is the one we focus upon as we spend this day together...the first Leadership Conference for a Mission District that is only 5-months old! We are 'a people belonging to God'. As we read/heard in Nehemiah's prayer, recalling what God had earlier said to Moses: *'I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as **a dwelling for my Name.**'* I like the way this reads in The Message: *'I will put them back in **the place I chose to mark with my Name.**'*

Nehemiah inquires about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. Upon receiving this distressing report, Nehemiah describes his response this way: *'I sat down and wept...for days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.'* [1:4] Have you ever received such news that you couldn't even stand up, causing you to weep and mourn and fast and pray before God for days? This compassion, this identifying and associating with 'the Jewish remnant', offers us a compelling component of faithful leadership. Namely, *authentically caring about others.* Nehemiah was not sympathetic, he was compassionate. He felt, actually experienced, the pain and distress of God's people, for he was one of them. We, as clergy and leaders within our congregations, have felt our own pain, along with the pain and distress of God's people...and, I trust, we have shown compassion...that we have wept and mourned and prayed.

We are God's people, coming together and being shaped into a Mission District that has never before existed and for which we really do not have a template, pattern, or mold. We are gathered to share our joys and our concerns, our disappointments and our dreams, and beseeching God to unite them into a vision that will guide our shared work long into the foreseeable future. We intend for our congregations, along with our homes and our hearts, to be places God has chosen *'to mark with His Name.'*

May Nehemiah's prayer be our shared prayer, as he petitions God:

'O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name.' [1:11]

May we, God's servants in this time and Mission District, be people of prayer...people who revere the name of the God who created us, who redeemed us, and who has gathered us to be The Southwest Ohio Mission District of The North American Lutheran Church!

Amen.