

Bishop Gerhard Preibisch

To the angel of the church in Laodicea the Apostle was instructed to write: *"I wish that you were either cold or hot. (Rev 3:15b (NRSV))"*

Being a leader in the church today can be both encouraging and disheartening. On any given day I am either commended by someone who approves of my leadership or asked to resign by someone who disapproves.

Perhaps that is the nature of leadership. Shortly after I was elected to my second term as Bishop of the British Columbia Synod, I was asked: "What do you want to accomplish in your second term?" I responded that when I leave office I hope that our church will be more inclusive.

I am convinced that God prepares us for the tasks to which God calls us. I know something about being an outsider. At the age of ten I was called a Nazi. When I was a young man I was called a communist. Today, I am sometimes accused of being a liberal.

I was called a Nazi because I was a recent German immigrant. I was called a communist because I spoke up for the poor. Today, I am labeled a liberal because I advocate for an inclusive church – a church which welcomes and accepts all people.

It is my prayer that the British Columbia Synod will continue to strive to achieve the goals which we adopted in 2004. One of these goals is to: *"Develop a strategy which focuses on programs to welcome all members, regardless of gender, race, ancestry, colour, ethnic origin, appearance, citizenship, age, record of offenses, marital status, sexual orientation, economic status, family status or disability."*

I am reminded of a speaker addressing a predominately white international Lutheran youth gathering in Chicago in the 1960's. His words still echo in my mind. As I recall he said: *"When a black man wants to drink at a water fountain that is marked for white only they claim it is communist-inspired. When a black man wants to go to a washroom that is marked for white only they claim it is communist-inspired. When a black man wants to go in a restaurant that is for whites only they claim it is communist-inspired."*

He concluded by saying, *"To bad it is not Christian-inspired."*

Earlier this year, a member of one of our congregations said to me: *"Our congregation needs to be able to attract more fine church people – not the kind that hang around our church. He was referring to the poor, the homeless and those who suffered from a variety of problems such as drug and alcohol addiction."*

I responded: *"That is the rub when the church follows the example of Jesus Christ – who after all was accused of welcoming outcasts and eating with them." (Luke 15:2 )*

In one of the well known Eucharistic prayers we pray: *"and by this bread and cup make of us the body of your Son"* It is my prayer that, as members of the body of Jesus Christ today, more and more people, especially those who do not feel accepted by our society and sometimes not even by their own families, will see in us the Christ who: *"when he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless. (Matt 9:36)*

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