

August 8, 2006

Dear friends in Christ,

I was disappointed to learn today that Bishop Warren has formally filed charges against Pastor Brad. We had hoped that the bishop might make another decision, of course. But the disciplinary hearing process gives us one more chance to tell the story of the ministry we share with Pastor Brad at St. John's, and to make the case that we should continue in ministry as we have since Pastor Brad arrived in 2000.

Now that Bishop Warren has taken this step, I'd like to repeat a piece of the letter I sent to you back in April, after his meeting with our congregation: "So what do we do now? What we've done for the last 135 years: live the community of faith at St. John's."

Now, as in April, there's no cause for us to change anything at St. John's. Pastor Brad continues to serve as our pastor. St. John's relationship with the Southeastern Synod and the ELCA does not change. The Bishop's decision to file charges only means that Pastor Brad now has the chance to make his defense—to tell his story—to the hearing committee. And we continue to pray that he wins his case.

And, in the meantime, we also continue to be the great church we've always been. We gather together for worship each week around Word and Sacrament. We continue to feed the hungry and do justice with our ministries. We continue as a faithful member congregation of the synod, and we continue to pray for the synod staff, especially our bishop. Our church council and our congregational leaders continue to refuse to allow this process to distract St. John's from our ministry tasks. And when we do have to deal with these issues as a church, we do it with prayer and careful discernment.

I, perhaps like you, feel a range of emotions right now—hope, worry, anger, trust, sadness, fear, optimism, and even relief. And I expect to cycle through these and many other emotions in the days and weeks to come! In the midst of it all, however, I have great confidence and faith in St. John's. Even if I can't see every step in the path before us, I feel Jesus' presence in our midst, walking with us on our journey together. Above all, I feel blessed to be a member with you of our church home, and I feel honored and graced by Pastor Brad's presence at our altar.

Please continue to pray for Pastor Brad and Darin, for Bishop Warren, and for the synod staff. And please join us for our summer Sunday school this coming Sunday. We had originally planned to have a discussion about theology and current events, but it seems like the most pressing current event for St. John's now is the filing of these charges. We would like to give the congregation a chance to express feelings, ask questions, and talk about what the disciplinary process may mean for us.

Plan to bring a dish for the potluck and stay after church for our conversation. It will be a joy to gather together! And thank you for making St. John's what it is today.

With love and prayers,  
Laura Crawley  
St. John's Church Council President