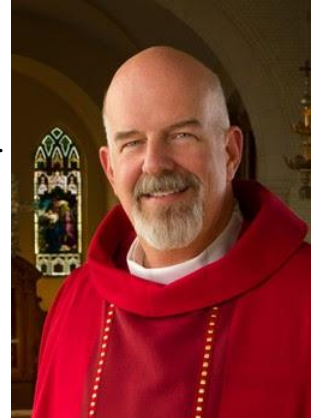


## **Excerpts from Bishop Hazelwood's "A Church in Labor"**

"We are in an era of tumultuous upheaval. Every aspect of the modern world is undergoing tremendous changes: newspapers, photography, banking, technology, transportation, education, communication, and of course, the church.

Post World War II saw economic expansion, a dominant white culture and the last vestiges of Christendom which reinforced church participation. *All that is gone.* We are not going to see 3-5% annual GDP growth, society is increasingly diverse and institutional forms of religious expression are waning.

Pastors, deacons and even the bishops in the ELCA were not prepared for what needs to happen now. They were taught through a combination of role models, upbringing, seminaries and internships to provide spiritual leadership in a world that no longer exists.



## **Four Pain Points for Life and Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

1. **Spiritual Vitality** - Bishop Hazelwood made observations by visiting churches and having conversations with pastors, deacons and church members that some places are lacking spiritual life while others are vibrant and blooming. A couple of examples of those lacking did not pray at the beginning or the end of meeting and lack of participation in any kind of bible study. A spiritually dead congregation is not in labor pains, it is in the early stages of hospice. Turning this around is a central task for leaders in our congregations, be they lay leaders or clergy.
2. **Congregational Finances** - Even the strongest New England Synod congregations are depending on older generations of donors to keep the doors open. Bishop Hazelwood stated that several years ago he explained at a presentation at a New England Synod Assembly that the New England Synod was a synod of 40-100-40. Forty congregations in crisis, 40 healthy and 100 in between trying to figure out which way they were going.

In the last 3 years, we've had churches close, others merge, others partner with Episcopal congregations and others go from full time clergy to part time. In 2018, Bishop Hazelwood now thinks we are 20 functionally or officially closed, 60 in crisis, 60 in the middle and 30 that are healthy.

3. **Changing Demographics** – Demographics in our synod are also indicators of the road ahead. The State of Connecticut specifically has seen a decrease in population, an economic trend that includes fewer high wage jobs, expensive property values and struggling urban centers.

Additionally, there is the oft-cited statistics that New England is the least church-attending region in the country, in part due to Yankee independence, rapid growth of secular attitudes, economic fragmentation, increasing suspicion of institutions, Roman Catholic sex scandals, and demographic trends in population decline, among others.

4. **Turbulent Social Times** – Regardless of where one stands on the political spectrum, it cannot be ignored that Mr. Trump's election is a destabilizing event. Bishop Hazelwood stated that in his view, the current political turbulence at a minimum, demonstrates a challenge to basic Christian

values, quoting from Galatians 5:22-23: *By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

The shift in public discourse is causing dramatic shifts in the tone and the substance of our common life. Permission has been granted for people, from all perspectives, to shout their opinions in ways that reinforce hostility, violence and intolerance.

## **Three Hopeful Options**

### **1. Experimentation Discovery**

The Bishop advocated that we embrace our declaration that we are a synod of holy experimentation. His reason is simple:

*The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, while expecting different results.*

In addition to experiments, we need to be about a more intentional process of discovery.

- What are we learning from our experiments?
- How are these experiments changing us?
- What adaptations are we making?

He believes our emphasis on experimentation has been good, but he now believes we need to be bolder. He also recognizes that the kind of change and dramatic upheaval may be required of our congregations requires a learning community.

### **2. Centers of Justice and Spiritual Strengthening**

- Can our congregations become centers of spiritual and justice strengthening?
- Should linking discipleship, compassion and justice be one of the marks of the church that is being born?
- How do we rediscover an authentic Lutheran spirituality?

### **3. Ecclesiastical Entrepreneurs**

Ecclesiastical Entrepreneurs are leaders or organizations, mostly congregations, who do the good and hard work of looking at the holes around them, and under the Spirit's guidance act on connecting resources to address those holes. Congregations need to think in terms of collaboration with their entrepreneurial pastor.

Some possible solutions:

- Part-time pastors
- Start other revenue streams
- Merge and sell buildings
- partner with other denominations
- become multi-point parishes
- close