

Fall Pastors Conference – *Life Together in Ministry*
 September 30, 2018
 Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

President Peter K. Lange
 Philippians 1:3-5
 Salina, Kansas

Koinonia for the Sake of the Gospel

Pastors Boxman and Kootz, brothers and sisters in Christ here at Trinity Lutheran Church of Salina, Reverend Dr. Nadasdy—our honored presenter for this conference, and especially you, my brothers in the ministry, here in the Kansas District:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Our text for this evening are these words from tonight’s Epistle reading—St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians, the 1st chapter: *“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”*

Life Together in Ministry is the theme chosen by the planning committee for this conference, based on the words before us. Life Together *in Mission* was our convention theme, based on the same words. “Partnership in the Gospel” is how the ESV puts it.

The apostle Paul here tells the Philippians that he gives thanks and prays with joy because of the partnership—the “life together,” the *κοινωνία* that he shares with them—*εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον*, literally “into the Gospel,” or we might say for the advancement of the Gospel.

This evening, as we consider these words, I invite you to put yourself in the shoes of the apostle Paul, and to view everybody else in this sacred space tonight and throughout this Kansas District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the same way that Paul viewed the Philippians. And, as we do that together, let’s reflect on the *κοινωνία* that we share with each other by virtue of our common *κοινωνία* with Christ—a *κοινωνία* that is also in our case “*εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον*”—for the advancement of the Gospel, in other words, a *κοινωνία* that is “in mission,” even as it is for us brother pastors a *κοινωνία* in ministry.

The fact is, we have been blessed by God with *κοινωνία* just like Paul had *κοινωνία* with the Philippians, and thanked God for it, and frequently prayed with joy because of it. So also we have been given the gift of *κοινωνία* with each other. But what exactly is that *κοινωνία*?

In his 2012 article, “Koinonia and Life Together in the New Testament,” Jeff Kloha asserts that, in the nearly 30 occurrences of *κοινωνία* in the New Testament, *κοινωνία* is not a thing, but an event that involves activity between more than one individual, all of whom share in something that is common between them. And thus, in Kloha’s words, “*κοινωνία* is “the manifestation of the relationships that exist between people who share together in a common thing.”

In any given place in the New Testament, that specific “common thing” might be, for example, the body and blood of Christ, as in 1 Corinthians 10; or it might be the Holy Spirit, as in Philippians 2; or the sufferings of Christ, as in Philippians 3; or it might even be a sinful *κοινωνία* in a negative thing, such as

the *κοινωνία* with demons that comes about by partaking of the table of demons, as Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 10.

So, what (or who) is at the center of our *κοινωνία* which is also “into the Gospel,” i.e. for the advancement of the Gospel? Answer? Jesus Christ is at the center of our *κοινωνία*! The Christ whom we came to know as we were called by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. The Christ who shows us the Father and through whom we know the Father. The Christ into whose body we were incorporated in our Baptism, where we were made brothers (and sisters) of Christ, co-heirs with Him, and children of the Heavenly Father with the privilege of calling upon Him, by name, in prayer. Christ with whose body we have *κοινωνία* as we partake of the bread of Holy Communion, and with whose blood we have *κοινωνία* as we partake of the cup of blessing. He is at the center of our *κοινωνία*. And in Him—because of the *κοινωνία* that each of us has with Him—we have *κοινωνία* also with one another, a *κοινωνία* that is also for us “into the Gospel,” i.e. for the advancement of the Gospel, just as was the *κοινωνία* shared between Paul and the Philippians.

But sometimes that God-given gift of *κοινωνία* becomes strained, doesn't it? Sometimes the gift becomes obscured by sin and encrusted with manifestations of our sinful nature as did the *κοινωνία* shared between Paul and Barnabas over the John Mark incident, or the God-given *κοινωνία* between Euodia and Syntyche, whom Paul had to “entreat” to “agree in the Lord” later in this same epistle.

Sometimes our *κοινωνία*, too, becomes strained so that “sharp disagreements” arise between us, and we may even “separate” from each other, as did Paul and Barnabas. Though we, in Christ, are nothing less than “brothers” (a term used 9 times in this epistle alone!), brothers who share a *κοινωνία* that is also “εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον”—for the advancement of the Gospel—sometimes we disagree on the very strategies to do that, so much so that our harmony becomes discordant.

We disagree about programs for evangelism. We disagree about the theology of missions. The Philippians supported Paul financially for the advancement of the Gospel, but sometimes we disagree on how to allocate the gifts of the saints for our common work together in this very advancement of the Gospel! We disagree about priesthood and ministry, as each of those precious gifts from God relates to the advancement of the Gospel. We disagree about what is sacred theology and what is “man-made” practice. We sometimes preach Christ from envy and rivalry. And though we all subscribe the Lutheran Confessions, when it comes to certain articles especially, we disagree on exactly what these portions of the Confessions mean, and maybe even what confessional subscription itself means, and whether certain articles of our confession are truly prescriptive for our Life Together in Ministry.

Dear brothers in Christ, with whom I share a Life Together in Ministry—an awesome calling to handle the holy things of God for the cure of souls and the advancement of the Gospel—let's begin this conference on our knees and confess before God and one another that we have sinned in our stewardship of the precious *κοινωνία* that we share. Let us humbly beg for God's forgiveness, and resolve with the aid of the Holy Spirit that we want to do better.

But hear this. God has put away your sin for the sake of Jesus Christ! In the infinite grace and mercy of your loving Heavenly Father, he has given you *κοινωνία* with the suffering and death of Jesus so that your sins are paid for! And by the repeated proclamation of the Gospel for you and to you, and by the word of Absolution to contrite sinners like you and me, and through the awesome and precious gift of *κοινωνία* with Christ's body and blood, He daily and richly forgives you all your sins and gives you

κοινωνία already today with Christ's resurrection and the reign of God which has no end! This is who you are, dear κοινωνοὶ of Christ and all that is His!

So, with Christ—as those who share κοινωνία with His body—let us love in deed and in truth. Let us control the rudder of our tongues. Let us seek peace and pursue it. Let us, together—as brothers in the ministerium—search the Scriptures in which we have life. Let us honor and keep our ordination and installation vows to be diligent in our study of Scripture and the Confessions so that we may approve what is excellent. And then let us find new ways, new forums and avenues to discuss together God's precious Word which is "the only infallible rule of faith and practice," along with the Creeds which are "faithful testimonies to the truth of the Holy Scriptures," and our precious Lutheran Confessions which are "also in agreement with this one scriptural faith" and to which we once gave a bold *quia* subscription on the day of our ordination, and about which we repeat that same *quia* subscription in each new place where we are installed. Let us put on love and seek to live in perfect harmony with one another. Let us stand firm in one Spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel. Let us be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Let us do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than ourselves.

Why? Εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον! For the advancement of the Gospel. So that, even while acknowledging and appreciating that there are varieties of gifts, and thanking God for the same, we may also sharpen one another, and test the spirits, and approve what is excellent, so that our preaching of the Word may never shrink from a real, salutary, and loving preaching of God's Law to prepare the way for Christ, and so that the Gospel we proclaim is always the purest and sweetest healing Word from God that knows nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Dear brothers, let us strive for that ideal of Life Together in Ministry, even as we give all thanks and praise to God for the gift of κοινωνία with Christ and each other.

In the name of Jesus. Amen!