

I-K Lutheran

Where God is doing new things

February 2018

People who live with patience, who believe in the resurrection and are empowered by the Spirit, offer their lives to God as a response to God's gracious gift of patience to them.¹

In his fascinating book, [The Patient Ferment of the Church](#), the late Mennonite theologian Alan Kreider (who taught at the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, IN) digs deeply into the life, theology, and practices of the church in the Roman Empire of the second and third centuries after the death and resurrection of Jesus to find clues as to why the church grew in times of significant challenge. Near the very center of the church's teaching and practice of that time Kreider was surprised to discover patience.



Kreider points out that “according to the evidence at our disposal, the expansion of the churches was not organized, the product of a mission program; it simply happened. Further, the growth was not carefully thought through. Early Christian leaders did not engage in debates between rival ‘mission strategies.’” The evidence at our disposal does suggest, however, that a significant reason for the growth of the church was the Holy Spirit working through Christian people and communities embodying patience. The “strange patience” of Christians, said Justin Martyr using early church language, caused pagans to become believers.

This patience is not just about waiting in a long line at the grocery store or working one's way through a traffic jam. The patience early church leaders encouraged Christian people to embody had more to do with trusting God, letting go of the need to be in control, and living like they really believed that Jesus rose from the dead and we will, too, at the end of life and as we live baptized lives every day. This is how Kreider summarizes what he learned about patience in the early church:

- *Patience is rooted in God's character:* God is patient, is working inexorably across the centuries to accomplish his mission, and in the fullness of time has disclosed himself in Jesus Christ.
- *The heart of patience is revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ:* Jesus's life and teaching demonstrate what patience means and beckon those who follow him to a patient lifestyle that participates in God's mission.
- *Patience is not in human control:* People who live a patient lifestyle trust God and do not try to manipulate outcomes; they live incautiously, riskily.
- *Patience is not in a hurry:* Patient Christians live at the pace given by God, accepting incompleteness and waiting.
- *Patience is unconventional:* It reconfigures behavior according to Jesus's teachings in many areas, especially wealth, sex, and power.
- *Patience is not violent:* It accepts injury without retaliating in kind, because violence is not God's calling to them and cannot bring fundamental change.
- *Patience gives religious freedom:* It does not compel religious beliefs and observances.
- *Patience is hopeful:* It entrusts the future confidently to God.

Reflecting on Kreider's insights, I have been struck with how *impatient* we are so often as individuals and as communities of faith. We think saving the church is up to us. We want mission plans wrapped up tight and completed as soon as possible. We are so afraid of dying – in every way we can think of dying, as individuals and as congregations – that we cease to live the new, abundant, and lasting life of Jesus. We live cautiously, afraid to take risks for the sake of the gospel and the well-being of others. We try to manipulate outcomes. We fail to embody patient trust in God as we go about our daily lives.

The early church was often impatient, too, of course. But, as the early bishop Cyprian suggested in his treatise *On the Good of Patience*, “Christians were growing in numbers because they were distinct from the ‘unjust’ – living patiently in relation to their neighbors and enemies, doing good to them, and waiting for them to come to faith.” When they entrusted themselves to the patient God, who steadfastly and persistently continues to work hope, healing, and reconciliation in the world, and lived patiently with themselves and others, they shone with the light of Christ in ways that both ran against the impatience of the cultures in which they lived and drew others into the community of Christ.

May it be so for us in our own impatient world!

Bishop Bill Gafkjen

¹ All quotes above are from in Kreider, Alan. [The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire](#). © 2016 Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.



Bishop's Day for Youth

INDIANA-KENTUCKY SYNOD

8th – 12th Graders and Adult Mentors



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2018

Join us on Saturday, February 10, 2018, at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Carmel, Indiana, for Bishop's Day for Youth. Registration begins at 9:30 am (continental breakfast will be available) and the day begins at 10:00 am. Students in grades 8 through 12, as well as adult chaperones, are invited to join **Bishop Bill Gafkjen** for conversation, worship, games, workshops, a service project, lunch, and lots of fun. **Molly Beck Dean**, Director of the ELCA Youth Gathering, will help lead and will share information about this summer's Youth Gathering in Houston. The day will finish by 3 pm.

Register by emailing Pastor Dan Fugate at dfugate@iksynod.org. Cost is just \$5 per person.

Overnight housing is available on Friday night. There is also the option of a Friday evening activity.

Please let us know if you are interested. We will make it happen!

Pilgrim Lutheran Church, **3650 West 106th Street, Carmel, IN 46032**



Indiana-Kentucky Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

