

# *Around the Synod*

## **On Forgiveness**

Pastor Karen Sonray

Many years ago when I was on my Internship in Portland, Oregon, my husband and I had an old vehicle – a GMC Eagle – that had gotten our little family many places over the years. But one day the transmission started to fail. Interestingly enough, it could not go in Reverse, only Forward. We were unable to take it to the repair shop immediately but, rather, kept using that car several days as it was. To my chagrin, I discovered what an "unforgiving" car it was! We had to calculate our trips so that we would never need to "back up." Think about it. That's not easy, especially when you are parking.

God's gift of forgiveness allows us to go in "reverse" and let go of the power of past hurts from others and past failures on our part. By doing so, forgiveness moves us forward and helps us to not get "stuck" in bitterness, guilt and being victims.

There are more Scriptures about forgiveness in the New Testament than any other theme. For Christianity this is one of our central beliefs. Some things that are helpful to me as I think about forgiveness are:

- Forgiving someone does not discount that injustice or wrong happened.
- Forgiving someone releases you from the negative power that event or relationship plays in your life. It may help you more than the person you forgive.
- That being said, forgiveness can be the beginning of "turning around" another person. We release them to God's agenda instead of our own.
- The phrase "Hurt people hurt people" has helped me understand why people lash out and hurt others. This does not excuse hurting others. It does generate more compassion on my part and awareness that brokenness and sin comes from the entire community and not just one individual.

I have been reading a book entitled "Amish Grace, How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy," and recommend it. The Amish people believe in forgiving a person as soon as possible because the Scriptures command us to do so. They forgive first and then their grief, healing and the "sinner's" repentance hopefully follow. This reminds me of how God forgives us! As Lutherans, we believe we cannot even repent on our own, but knowing the good news of God's forgiveness, His Spirit calls us and we are able.

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can.

Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can." Martin Luther King