Jim Frantti update at Minister's teleconference 4 November 2021

Welcome to our gathering this evening and our discussion. I was given this assignment to give a brief update on some of the current matters that we are dealing with. Also, I will mention updates about the work that is going on at the office and with the board. So, we will go ahead with that update presentation. Adrian [Pirness] will be advancing the slides as I collect my thoughts and try to address some of these things. At our ministers and wives camp at Camp Kipa in October we did visit about some of these same matters. So, some of these things I touch on now were touched on there. But we thought it would be good to share some of these things this evening.

I will first mention the LLC wide meeting that was held at the Monticello Church in the first part of May [7-8]. It was a very broadly attended meeting. Speaking personally now, I will have to say that I felt that God's Holy Spirit was with us there and it spoke at that meeting. We felt very strong unity across those congregation representatives who participated in the meeting. There were a few speeches there that were troubling and they did not seem to be in the same unity of understanding. They seem to find fault with and criticisms for our North American Zion. Those were sad to hear. The meeting concluded with a plea for anyone who did not feel in unity with the meeting and the spirit of the meeting to seek help. They were encouraged to ask from their nearby congregations or from the LLC or wherever they would like to seek help. But to [this] date – to my knowledge, at least – we have received no such request for help for those who feel that they are not in unity with the North American Zion. We had hoped that it would happen but it has not happened to [this] date. We are now several months down the road from that meeting.

So, what are some of the underlying matters? We have many times received this kind of thought, request or recommendation that we need to get help from Finland. We have shared that [thought] with the Finnish brothers [on the SRK], when we have visited with them. We do this quite frequently. Their response to us was this. It is important to trust that God's kingdom is here in North America. God's Holy Spirit is here guiding and can take care of things. We know that there are connections to Finland from those who are so critical of our North American Zion. Unfortunately, I think that sometimes it causes confusion there, as well, about the situation here.

It was troubling to hear that again the Wolf Lake – I don't know if I can say the congregation – at least some members held their own confirmation school rather than having the children participate in the LLC sponsored confirmation schools.

We know that there continues to be this thought about or question raised about ministers serving in Minneapolis and Wolf Lake [and] the reasons why that is not happening.

Some of you participated or listened in on our LLC annual meeting. I would have to say again that we experienced broad unity from the delegates. It was very nice to experience it. But we also did have some things come up there that were – I thought – a bit puzzling and unclear. But

all in all I felt that the meeting went very well. Again we felt the support of the congregations for the work of God's Kingdom here in North America.

When we think about what are the basic causes of the division or what are some of the underlying matters that seemed to be questioned regarding the teaching in our North American Zion? It seems like one matter is the doctrine of the congregation. We will have a chance to hear the very good presentation that our brother Matti Taskila prepared. Eric Jurmu will share it later. It will touch on that topic. So, I will not elaborate on that now.

Another item is the question of the sanctification of the spirit versus the sanctification of the word. Oftentimes we have heard this exhortation that we have to turn to the Word. We have to read the Word and study the Word. Of course, it is important. God's Word is our highest authority. God's Word is the light that shows the pathway to heaven. God's Word is our foundation. We are always encouraged to read and study God's Word. But we understand that the letter alone cannot give life. It is the spirit that gives life. Faith comes by hearing. It is the spirit that opens God's Word and makes it a Living Word. We always say that the office of the Holy Spirit is an office of sanctifying. We could study God's Word with all of our waking moments. Unless it is given life by the spirit, it is not going to give us faith. It is a Word that is used in virtually every Christian Church in the world. But it does not bestow the gift of faith without the presence of the Holy Spirit. So, it joins the point with the office of the Holy Spirit. Jesus many times said: he who has an ear to hear let him hear what the spirit says on to the churches. There is a reason why he said that. It is because the spirit is the comforter, the guide, the one who teaches us in all things. As we confess in the Apostles Creed, the spirit is the third person of God. So, when the spirit speaks, it is God speaking to us. So, it is no wonder then that Jesus said – Whoever has ears needs to hear what the spirit says.

We have heard over the last few years actually a criticism of the LLC board, local boards and also ministers. There have been these kinds of criticisms. We have a wrong view [they say] of the governance of the house of God that somehow boards and ministers are being placed as rulers or Lords to hand down dictates. It is not something that I have experienced at all with you dear brothers who are believing as I am believing. And when I have attended meetings, I have found that the servants are humble servants. There is a reason why we are called servants. As Jesus said, the servant is not greater than the master. Jesus wants to ask the question: Who is greater – He that sits at meat or he that serves? It had a very obvious answer. I haven't experienced that kind of ruling nature of local boards, speakers or LLC boards.

But included in the criticism has been this. The speakers in North America speak too much about the endeavor of faith and not enough about grace. Yet it seems to me that God's word when I hear it spoken at services in North America, it is a word of Grace and Truth. I don't know how we separate the endeavor from faith, because faith is an endeavor. The encouragement that we hear, for example, to put away sin, does not make some work out of putting sin away or out of confession. To me it is just a loving reminder that believers do not have to carry sin on their conscience. We have the Fountain of Grace that we can approach at any time and as often as we need to be freed from sin and the burden that besets.

We hear this kind of criticism or accusation Of law-mindedness and spiritual abuse [12:05] That is something that has been really troubling to me to hear. I haven't experienced anything like that. The term of spiritual abuse is one that is used sometimes in this world. I don't see anything in God's Kingdom [and] in the care of God's Kingdom that would cause us to say that there is some kind of spiritual abuse happening in North American Zion. To me, God's kingdom is a place where we are cared for. The Bible clearly tells us that God chastens and rebukes those that He loves. But it is a loving rebuke. It is always accompanied with his promise and offer of grace and forgiveness. That is why we put our trust in God's Kingdom, because it is a place of care where sinners can be cared for, above all, with the power of the Gospel, which is the power of God to all that believe. So, it is really troubling to hear that kind of view of our dear North American Zion That it is a place of law-mindedness, heavy-handed governance, and spiritual abuse. That simply, dear brothers, has not been my experience at all. So, that is a very brief overview of where we are at.

I would mention before going on to the next slide. Recently there was a meeting. The southern Minnesota boards and speakers have annual meetings. This year I believe that all of the Minnesota congregation boards had participants in it. That meeting also was one where There were some speeches heard that were very troubling. Again there was criticism of North American Zion and fault with the teachings here. It is just sad to hear that. It feels to me like there are some who have lost sight of the beauty of God's Kingdom. I think that you brothers would join me in this prayer that I always have for myself that God would never allow me to lose sight of the beauty of His kingdom. [15:15]

So with that, we will move on to mention a few things about the work of the Gospel … [15:23 - 30:45]