



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

North/West Lower Michigan Synod

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The Bishop's Letter

April 2009

Making Us One

*God of all living, God of all loving, God of the seedling, the snow, and the sun,
Teach us, deflect us, Christ reconnect us, using us gently, and making us one.*

“Touch the Earth Lightly,” vs. 4, ELW 739

An invitation:

Please enter “Center for Mission & Ministry Groundbreaking” on your calendar for April 19. On that day you are asked also to include in your congregational prayers a petition for this significant moment in our life together as synod. At 3:30 that day you are invited to gather at Christ United, DeWitt, for worship and a brief walk to the place we will break the ground for a new expression of our common mission and ministry.

You are invited to share in your congregation this month and during the next several months the vision of the Mission & Ministry Campus. The narrative form of the vision is available at www.mittensynod.org and photographs and videos will be added in the coming weeks. The vision is expressed in the lovely hymn, Touch the Earth Lightly, especially in the verse cited above. We believe our unity with one another is always the work of Christ. Our care for creation and for one another, both in the body of Christ and in the broader human family, is also the work of Christ and a gift always initiated by Christ. We believe Christ is reconnecting us, “making us one.”

We are bold to ask for pledges, payable beginning in June and extending over a five-year period, which will enable us to virtually eliminate the debt incurred in this venture of faith. Now that the bids are in, and we have a guaranteed maximum construction price, we are aiming for 1111 gift units of \$1,800 each. Over the five year period this will produce exactly \$2 million! Our goal is that all 129 congregations, all rostered leaders, and many other individuals will participate. Our goal is that as many as possible of the 51,000 members of this synod will feel ownership of this visible expression of our common life and work for the sake of the world. (We've just begun to ask and have already received commitments totaling more than \$50,000.)

My personal goal is that between now and the dedication on November 1, I will have visited conferences and congregations all over this synod to tell the story of a campus where enrichment of our personal and congregational ministries is paramount, where lay people and pastors alike are encouraged and strengthened for the complexities of faithful witness in the 21st century. Please invite me or one of several others who have volunteered to help, to come to your place and “tell the story.”

Making Us One is the culmination of much work and input from dozens of leaders for something far more comprehensive and focused than we could have imagined even six months ago. I am grateful for all the promptings of the risen Christ which have brought us to this daunting moment. I hope to see you on the 19th. I count on your prayers.

An Undivided Heart

With you I yearn for an undivided heart to love God with my whole being and my neighbor as myself. This phrase, “an undivided heart,” is from Psalm 86:11. I’m reading this morning an alternate translation (TEV) of vs. 11 and 12: *Teach me, LORD, what you want me to do, and I will obey you faithfully; teach me to serve you with complete devotion. I will praise you with all my heart, O Lord my God; I will proclaim your greatness forever.* Whether “undivided heart” or “complete devotion,” our Lutheran eyes remember quickly this is no human accomplishment but totally grace, always gift.

This gift is the theme of our Synod Assembly. I invite you to include in your prayers in the 40 days leading up to the assembly (May 17-19) petitions and intercessions that the baptized of this synod will overflow with an undivided heart. The fruit of such a heart is the wonderful mix of a holy restlessness and the peace that passes all human understanding. The fruit is the capacity to be both joyful and hopeful in the most challenging times. It is the capacity to be for others even when many of the props that provide some temporal security have been shaken or have even vanished.

Our intent is to send you periodically (via e-mail) some suggestions to include in your devotional life during the 40 days. I encourage you to meet with other voting members and registered visitors from your congregation (and conference if that can be arranged) sometime prior to the assembly for prayer and conversation about God’s mission for us.

Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust

I hope you have or will read both the proposed ELCA Social Statement on Human Sexuality and the related Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies. Both documents merit conversation and prayer with colleagues and fellow parishioners in anticipation of the gathering of the 1000 plus 2009 Churchwide Assembly voting members. The latter document recognizes that we have not been given a common hermeneutic with regard to homosexuality. It suggests a way forward together that respects the bound conscience of the other which could result in “structured flexibility” regarding the rostering of persons in committed, faithful, same-gender relationships. It would use and honor the candidacy processes and the current practices of this church which gives “call” authority to congregations and to synods.

As it should be, we cannot know ahead what the Churchwide Assembly voting members will decide. Regarding especially the Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies, it is proposed that these members consider one small step/resolution at a time. It could mean no change from current policies or the structured flexibility cited above. Pray for the Churchwide Assembly what we pray for in our own Synod Assembly: an undivided heart.

Bishop John

During the month of April, you are invited to join others in this synod reading Deuteronomy and the Moravian Daily Texts.



Earthkeeping News & Updates

Kim Winchell, Diaconal Minister

kwinchellm@aol.com

Peace to you, Peace to the Earth!

April is one of those months filled with so many spiritually rich moments ... Holy Week and Easter Morning, and the “settling in” of spring to further cheer our spirits. May all the blessings and joys of this month be yours!

Remember that April 22 is Earth Day. You can find useful congregational resources at www.nceccojustice.org.

Identifying our Synod’s congregational “Green Teams”

I have been trying to document all of the congregational earthkeeping or “green teams” that are among us. The numbers are growing! I believe there are at least 16 congregations with some kind of intentional committee or task force. A number of other congregations have some “care of creation” efforts, even without a named team. I hope to be able to acknowledge those congregations with “teams” at synod assembly. So, please get in touch with me, if I should know about your congregation or if you’re not on my list. Thank you all for your efforts!

Congregations with earthkeeping teams:

Cross of Christ, Petoskey	Christ, Wyoming	Leer, Posen	Immanuel, Grand Ledge
Prince of Peace, Rose City	Prince of Peace, Portage	St. Luke’s, Muskegon	Trinity, Hillsdale
Grace, Hastings	St. Luke, Stevensville	Messiah, Bay City	Immanuel, Mt. Pleasant
Trinity, Grand Rapids	Grace, Lansing	St. Peter, Battle Creek	All Saints, Mason

Possible preaching dates available:

It’s my goal to be out among you about once a month, so here are some dates when I may be able to come to your congregation to share an earthkeeping message and discussion: May 3; June 7; July 5; Aug 9; Sept 20; Oct 4 (St. Francis Day!); Nov 8 or 15; Dec 6. Some other dates or evenings may be possible, depending on travel distance. As always, I am also available by phone / email, to help you in whatever ways I can.

Excitement grows!

... For our synod’s Center for Mission & Ministry in DeWitt! I am personally very excited about the vision and potential for the Center. Did you know that we will be seeking to make it as “green” a facility as possible? Did you know that we are aiming for a building that will even achieve LEED certification by the U.S. Green Building Council (LEED = Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). What a witness that will be! We can be very proud of ourselves, if that indeed comes to pass.

I plan to show my support through a five-year pledge and I hope that many of you will too. I am excited about the opportunities the Center for Mission & Ministry will provide for us to grow and learn together, and the ways it will help us to be church and a synod in fresh ways.

We live in a time when we are beginning to appreciate, anew, that true richness comes through the wealth of relationships – with one another, with other families of faith, and indeed, with all of creation. The Center for Mission & Ministry can help us to build and strengthen such relationships. Let’s be a part of this exciting journey together! See you on April 19 for groundbreaking – remember to carpool! ☺



What is the Book of Faith Initiative?

The Initiative is an invitation to Imagine:

Imagine – People in your congregation excited about the Scriptures.

Imagine – People in your congregation talking about and understanding the insights Lutherans bring to studying the Bible.

Imagine – People in your congregation becoming passionate about Bible study.

Imagine – People in your congregation growing in their witness, service, and stewardship as they study and talk about the Bible.

Imagine – All the ways God’s Spirit can work in and through the people of your congregation as they talk about and study the Bible.

Can the Book of Faith Initiative truly facilitate such wonderful imaginings to become reality? Yes and no, to a great extent it depends upon the leaders of this church, both lay and clergy, to encourage their brothers and sisters in Christ to open their Bibles and join the conversation.

The Initiative suggests looking at the variety of ways the Bible can speak to us:

- Devotional Reading
- Historical Reading
- Literary Reading
- Lutheran Theological Reading

These methods have helped folks in past generations and continue to be effective today. They are discussed at length in the resource *Opening the Book of Faith*. These are not the only methods that can be used, but they are a good place to begin.

What the Book of Faith Initiative is NOT !

The Book of Faith Initiative is not a top-down, curriculum-based approach. The Initiative is not a program, a course, a kit, a method, or a technique. The Book of Faith resources are not the Book of Faith Initiative. There is no one way to implement the Book of Faith Initiative.

Where do you start?

- What are the unique challenges that you face in your setting?
- How well are the people in your place of ministry acquainted with Scripture?
- What role does Scripture play in your ministry now?
- What additional roles could and should it play?

Once you and your congregation have grappled with questions like these, the hope of the Initiative is that you will design a *course of action* unique to your setting that will address the needs and challenges you have identified. It is hoped you will look to others to give clues about how to respond, and that once you have tried a response, you will share what you have done with the rest of the church so that others can learn from you.

Questions? Contact the NWL Michigan Synod Advocates:

Erin Hill-Van Horn.....ekhill25@hotmail.com or 269-227-3241
Robert Pooleyrwpooley@msn.com

Coaching Corner

Paul Werner, Coaching Coordinator

A coach is someone who comes alongside and walks with you as you discover God's will and do it.

How do a leader (one being coached) and a coach decide to work together?

Working through the Synod Coaching Coordinator, the leader receives the names of one or more possible coaches. An initial informal contact occurs, usually by phone. This gives the two persons a chance to discuss the possibility of a coaching relationship. The leader shares what he or she wishes to work on in enough detail that both understand what the coaching relationship will entail. A rough estimate of how long the two will work together and on what sort of schedule is decided. Meetings or phone calls can be planned—usually monthly. The leader decides whether to proceed working with the coach after the get acquainted session.

When agreement occurs, a short, concise written Coaching Covenant is formulated that clarifies the working relationship. Both persons endorse the covenant before work begins. Almost always, the coach drafts the contract and shares it with the leader for edits and modifications. Here are the items usually included in a contract:

- the focus for the coaching relationship
- specific objectives to be accomplished (usually no more than two or three)
- mutual commitments, such as regular meetings; doing the homework; being punctual; including each other in prayer; remaining open to the workings of the Holy Spirit; periodic evaluation of progress; confidentiality; keeping notes; commitment to candor and honesty; and, what to do if a meeting needs to be cancelled or postponed
- schedule and length of commitment (usually 60 minutes monthly for 6-12 months)
- any specific duties that either party agrees to complete (who makes the calls, who writes the notes and timeliness commitments)
- expenses anticipated and who is responsible for these expenses

(Regarding expenses...a coach may or may not charge a nominal fee for his or her time. This is a legitimate expense, but many coaches do not charge fees. Be sure to have this discussion during the get acquainted call or visit. Other expenses such as the cost of long distance calls, travel and the like are usually the responsibility of the leader, unless decided otherwise. It is possible to set up free conference calls using internet resources. Most coaching relationships proceed with very little monetary investment by either person.)

Once the covenant is completed, the work and joy of coaching begins. Come follow along over the next several months to learn the steps and tools used in a basic coaching relationship.

Want more information?

Watch this space in upcoming newsletters for more information about coaching. To learn more, contact me at 989-326-1184 or ptwerner@charter.net.

Interdependence Celebrated

Carolyn Mann, Synod Vice-President

It seems to me, in this period of economic uncertainty, it is *a time to celebrate* one of the significant elements in our lives together, namely *our interdependence*. It is important to recognize the chain of connectedness that exists between us today, as well as the one between us and the generations of faithful who have gone before us. As members of the ELCA we are frequently reminded of the three expressions of this church and how they are inter-related. In spite of this, the question often arises, “Is there a need for congregations to respond to the synod *and* to the churchwide organization when there is so much ministry to accomplish locally?”

As I thought about how “the larger whole” enables all of us to do ministry more effectively, I realized there wasn’t enough space here to articulate all of it. Local congregations certainly reach out to the unchurched and the less fortunate. Congregations provide havens for study, worship, healing and sharing burdens. The equipped saints are enabled to move beyond the doors of the church to the local mission field – and having been blessed – are a blessing to others!

The other two segments of this church – the synod and the churchwide organization – in turn provide undergirding support and some of the essential tools which *enable the whole church* to carry out its mission across the synod, the nation and the world. Think about the myriad ways in which this church prepares its people to act in God’s world, through its units, agencies and institutions.

- § Twenty-eight colleges and universities and eight seminaries provide education, scholarships, and faith formation for thousands of adults.
- § Programming across the church takes place in areas of education, the Book of Faith Initiative, congregational outreach and development, the church in society, multicultural ministries, and stewardship priorities.
- § Workshops, training events, outdoor ministries, youth and young adult ministries, Women of the ELCA, Lutheran Men in Mission, and Lutheran Campus Ministry offer avenues for faith formation and service.
- § Loans for church buildings, plus opportunities for saving and investment in the larger church are provided through the Mission Investment Fund and the ELCA Foundation.
- § Augsburg Fortress, the publishing ministry of this church issues educational curricula, worship and music resources, and theological books.
- § Lutheran agencies provide a host of social services across the land, under the umbrella of Lutheran Services of America, the largest organization of its kind in the nation.
- § Collective advocacy for the poor and marginalized takes place through the Washington office of the ELCA, the Lutheran World Federation, and Lutheran World Relief. ELCA Global Mission supports 265 missionaries serving in more than 90 countries. Companion synod relationships supply us with a continuing model for accompaniment and interdependence.

A Time to Celebrate!
66 million Lutherans do make a difference!
God’s work. Our hands.

Living Water Ministries Addresses Economic Issues

At Living Water Ministries we understand the economic fear and reality that many of us are facing. We desire that every child have the opportunity to attend camp this summer even in the midst of that fear, but realize the dilemma this creates. In light of this dilemma, our Board of Directors held an emergency meeting to discuss how to make camp possible for everyone. We hope that the Economic Hardship Response described below will provide an avenue for every child to attend camp this summer. Please share this response with families who may need or benefit from it.

Economic Hardship Response

If you are currently unemployed or fear you will lose your job sometime this year, we understand your fears and empathize with your needs. An uncertain career and life status for this coming summer could make it hard for you to register your child for camp, even though you still would like your child to have this meaningful opportunity. We hope the following options will provide you the flexibility and financial security you need to make your child's essential camp experience possible.

1. If you are unemployed now or become unemployed by the time of her week of camp, we will refund all but \$100 of your registration fees and she may still attend camp.

OR

2. If you are unemployed now or become unemployed by the time of his week of camp, or have found work that required you and your family to move out of state, we will refund your entire registration fee and cancel his enrollment.

TourdeRevs Update

Michael Anderson, Synod Hunger Team

On June 23, 2009, the "Tour de Revs" will be arrive in Lansing. (Note: An incorrect date was previously published. June 23 is the correct date.) The Tour de Revs are three pastors and a bamboo bicycle who have a goal of visiting the 65 synods, the Churchwide Assembly and the National Youth Gathering. Their purpose is to raise money and awareness for the ELCA World Hunger Appeal. The Synod Council has authorized the Opening Worship Offering to be designated for "Tour de Revs." We invite each congregation to bring a check for this offering (payable to North/West Lower Michigan Synod with ELCA World Hunger Appeal on the memo line or stub). You are also invited to come to Lansing on June 23. We are especially looking for bikers to come and ride with the "three Revs." If you can help with hosting/lodging, contact Lois Neves at 517-349-9349 or leneves@comcast.net.

We welcome to our synod:

- Pastor David Dockweiler who was ordained on March 22 (Homewood, IL) and will serve as Associate Pastor at Prince of Peace, Portage.
- Pastor David Louder who will serve as Campus Pastor with Western Michigan University Lutheran Campus Ministry.

ELCA Brand Campaign Goes National

The ELCA brand campaign is going national. After two years of research, testing and tweaking, the ads are ready for prime time. From May 11 - 31, during sweeps, a flight of [television ads](#) will **broadcast nationally** on CNN, CNN Headline News, Fox News, HGTV and DIY Network.

This flight will be supported with print, outdoor and online advertising artwork that can be used by congregations. Some of the ad materials are customizable to include a congregation's name and address. A warm-up flight of ads will air March 30 - April 19 nationally on the same channels.

We need your help!

First, utilize the [bulletin inserts](#) so your members are aware of the ads. A congregational marketing kit will provide other ways (postcards, posters, banners, etc.) for you to increase the visibility of the campaign in your synod, congregation and community. The congregational marketing kit will be launched in phases throughout April at [Our Brand](#) on the ELCA Web site. Check back as new resources are added.

Also available on www.elca.org:

- [Get started](#)
- View the [TV ads](#)
- Read the [print ads](#)

About the campaign

The purpose of the ELCA brand campaign is to grow awareness of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and inspire members to invite others to a worship service.

Why now? In uncertain economic times, when many are experiencing life challenges, this church wants people (members and nonmembers) to know that we are out there offering hope and care - - doing God's work with our hands.

This integrated marketing strategy is designed to maximize the number of impressions for members -- as well as nonmembers -- throughout the country. By putting this comprehensive plan into action, we hope to spread the word about what God is doing in and through the ELCA.

Brandmark resources

You can download the ELCA brandmark (with tagline "God's work. Our hands.") in a variety of formats in the [brandmark](#) section of the Web site. You can even [customize the brandmark](#) for your congregation.