



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

North/West Lower Michigan Synod

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The Bishop's Letter

January 2010

What Kind of Future?

O the depth of the riches and wisdom of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! Romans 11:33

In recent conversations with conference deans, the advisory board for the Center for Mission & Ministry, our staff, the Synod Council, and members of Christ United, I have had abundant opportunity to listen for a guiding word from the Holy Spirit about our future. I continue to be amazed at how God exhorts, comforts, and reframes our thinking about the future in the fellowship of the baptized.

I pray frequently these days for the gift of resilience. As it is, I suspect, for you, my life is full of nuances and complexities which are daunting. My grounding is dwelling in the Word, in Jesus, in the gospel proclaimed, in Holy Scriptures. My grounding, too, is in frequent contact with sisters and brothers where a covenant of love and mutual trust and commitment is affirmed and embraced. Thus it is that my spirit is renewed, and I am filled with hope.

Implications of the guiding and grounding activity of God for our future as synod mean we will be flexible, perhaps as never before. We will focus on growing and being renewed in Christ, on being connected and collaborative, always for the sake of the gospel. By grace we will be for each other and do with one another many works of Christ in a highly stressed, materially very barren environment. (Think "wilderness" here.)

My visit to Goambot Village in Papua New Guinea has become a compelling frame of reference for me. I learned anew that relationships with God and with each other are everything. The villagers have no money, yet are rich both in community and creativity, caring for one another, figuring things out, making do with what they have. So, for us these values become operative in the following ways

- In these financially lean times, we will move to a four-day work week (Monday through Thursday) for our synod support staff. But aided by voice mail and e-mail, we will stay connected with you, caring with and for you, albeit with fewer hours of “in person” contact.
- Given that this year we raised just slightly more than a quarter million dollars in Making Us One gifts and pledges for the Mission & Ministry campus and not the 1.5 million we needed to proceed with construction on the Christ United site, we will invest and secure interest on gifts already given and still being sought while we methodically “figure out” together what exactly is next and when. But, celebrating what we have already learned from this process, Nancy Brousseau and a growing number of ministry partners are embodying the growing, renewing, connecting, collaborating purposes of the Center for Mission & Ministry in new programs for equipping the saints, some at Christ United, some at other sites around the state.
- With the rising costs of leasing space at 801 S. Waverly Rd, we will move the synod offices to St. Stephen Lutheran Church (January 25-27), reducing this expense by more than half. We will “make do” with less dedicated space, and more fully live into the vision of working in partnership with our congregations.

God’s gift to us is hope, grounded always in the gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection. 2009 was a hard year, and I confidently predict 2010 will be too. Both the recession and the impact of the Churchwide Assembly ministry policy decisions have been tough for many, including virtually all the ministries of the synod. Therefore, we will rely ever more deeply on the inscrutable, always wonderful ways God works things out.

Saying Good Bye and Hello

At the end of this month, Clay Bates will conclude his ministry as Assistant to the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission. I am grateful for the ministry Clay has performed. My appreciation for him has increased in these final weeks since he decided to resume parish ministry. His tenacity and conscientiousness is “off the charts,” and he continues to work diligently as he prepares for the next chapter in his calling. Now we say “good bye” to him in this role, confident that any parish to which he will be called will be blessed. In these past two years, Clay has touched the lives of people in dozens of congregations, challenging them to faithful stewardship of God’s gifts. He has helped lay the foundation for forming “tables” around which people will gather according to their particular passions for ministry.

Now, too, we say “hello” to Roger Hardy. Roger and Sharon will leave their home in Minneapolis on January 11, arriving in their new home in East Lansing later that week. With the gift of a few days overlap to work with Clay, Roger will begin his work with us on January 19. He brings with him experience and gifts in both rural and urban ministry, new and renewing congregations, and 12 years of internship supervisory experience. I am grateful to have this tested and wise colleague working with us in helping every congregation, every conference radiantly blossom in sharing the Gospel.

Bishop John

Center for Mission & Ministry News and Updates

Nancy Brousseau, OP

Center for Mission & Ministry Facilitator

Training for Facilitating Contemplative Groups Registration

Begins January 21, 2010

Christ United, DeWitt

You won't want to miss this opportunity to learn a prayerful facilitation approach and skills that can be used in a variety of contexts. The process can be helpful for forming small groups based on ministry support, spiritual guidance and growth in the spiritual life, or ongoing faith-sharing of church members.

Each session will offer a focused study, readings, prayer, and peer learning experience. Participants will be invited to begin a group in their church and be mentored through the process.

See the December newsletter for dates and cost. Come as an individual or come as a team of two or more. (Not limited to ELCA members).

Email nancybrousseau@mittensynod.org or call 517-321-5066 for more information or to register for the program which begins January 21, 2010 at Christ United in DeWitt and runs for 7 sessions ending June 3, 2010.

Spirituality in Lutheran Perspective

Friday, April 23, 2010

Immanuel, Mt. Pleasant

Rev. Dr. Lisa Dahill, Assistant Professor of Worship and Christian Spirituality, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, will lead these sessions:

- 2pm-5pm: Clergy and Lay Leaders
- 7pm-9pm: Congregations

Foundations of Christian Spirituality

Saturday, April 24, 2010

St. Stephen, Lansing

This session of the year-long Foundations of Christian Spirituality program is open to anyone who is interested. Dr. Dahill will lead us in exploring the theology of Martin Luther and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. More details will be provided in the February newsletter.

Lutherland: Ecumenical Pilgrimage and Study Tour

October 10-23, 2010

Imagine spending almost two weeks exploring the roots of Lutheran life and spirituality and experiencing first-hand the birthplace of the Reformation! This will not be your typical European Tour. We will visit Berlin, Wittenberg, Torgau, Leipzig, Eisleben, Erfurt, Buchenwald, Eisenach - the Wartburg and Bach's birthplace, Marburg, Worms, Mainz and end with an cruise on the Rhine - and more besides.

You will meet local Christian leaders, hear of the peaceful revolution and the fall of the wall, listen to Protestant nuns at an Augustinian monastery, worship, study, enjoy the cuisine and sights of this inspirational land as we travel together, faith companions and pilgrims on a spiritual journey you will never forget. The brochure, costs, reservation form will be available on the synod web site very soon. We invite you to be pilgrims with us.



Earthkeeping News & Updates

Kim Winchell, Diaconal Minister

kwinchellm@aol.com

Blessings and greetings to you in this New Year! May it be a year of fresh hopes and new, “green” growth, for all of us and for all of creation. As Christians, much of our personal growth happens “inwardly,” through God’s love and grace. It is that “greening of our spirits” that then invites, empowers, and moves us to acts of love, compassion, and justice in the healing or “greening” of our world. Even as our we move into the heart of our Michigan winter, with its snow and cold, and often gray skies, be alert for those inner stirrings of God’s spirit moving within us, “greening” us and calling us forth, for the sake of the world.

Looking ahead to 2010

- Congregational “green team” retreats: hopefully, two – one at Stony Lake in the spring (May?) and one at Michi-Lu-Ca in the fall (Oct). Stay tuned and/or email me for more information.
- “Lutherans Restoring Creation” This new, churchwide initiative is working on building a web site and developing resources and programs. If you’d like a sneak peek at this work in process, visit www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org
- Coming soon: A thought-provoking DVD (10 min) about the 2009 ELCA “Climate Change, Hunger, and Poverty” study trip to Nicaragua, with a 6-page congregational discussion guide (pdf). Check at www.elca.org/caringforcreation and www.elca.org/environment for details.
- Lenten worship series “Creation Waits with Eager Longing” is still available online at www.elca.org/caringforcreation at the Living Earth logo. Pr. Dan Stoneback, Prince of Peace, Rose City, used it in 2009 and says he would be happy to discuss it with anyone who would like to know how it went at his church. Contact Pastor Dan at princeofpeace@m33access.com.
- Remember to order your Palm Sunday fair-trade Eco Palms! www.lwr.org/palms
- New VBS material on caring for creation, from “Sparkhouse,” an independent group affiliated with Augsburg Fortress. See <http://www.wearesparkhouse.com/renew>.
- Another possible resource to use with Youth could be the “Keeping the Earth” Summer 2010 ELCA Outdoor Ministries curriculum. See www.elca.org/camps.
- “Greening our Spirits, Greening our World” – I have been invited to offer this retreat week again at Casa del Sol Spirituality & Retreat Center at Ghost Ranch in Abiquiu, NM (June 28-July 4); CEU credits may be available. See the online catalog at www.ghostranch.org or look under Retreats & Programs for the Casa.

And, as always, Peace to you, Peace to the Earth!

Robert Pooley

Synod Advocate for the Book of Faith Initiative

“Being the Body of Christ” - studies in 1 Corinthians is the latest in the “Together in Faith Series,” published by Augsburg Fortress to support the Book of Faith Initiative. I believe this Bible study comes at a very opportune time, and can help us address the “restlessness” Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson speaks of in the December issue of the Lutheran magazine.

In 1 Corinthians Paul does a masterful job of addressing the “restlessness” in the young church in Corinth, as they struggle with questions not unlike ours today. Who is right? Who is wrong? How can we live with the diversity among us? These are some of the questions Paul addresses in this compassionate letter.

In the “restlessness” of our culture and church it is easy to forget that the strength of community lies in finding unity in the midst of diversity. When we love those with whom we disagree, and work with those different from ourselves, community is strengthened.

Mark Allen Powell, in his book, “Opening the Book of Faith,” gives us five key principles Lutherans follow when they study or interpret the Bible. The 5th principle Dr. Powell shares is “Public Interpretation.”

He writes, “Lutherans say that the interpretation of Scripture is a public rather than a private one. Through the Bible, God speaks to Israel and the church, God does not speak directly or privately to individuals. What God says to Israel and the church may have specific application for individual lives, but the meaning of Scripture for individuals is to be in harmony with its universal meaning for the community of Faith.”

It is good for us to gather around God’s Word and listen to one another. The Bible study, “Being the Body of Christ” invites us to engage in meaningful conversations about how we can celebrate the diversity among us. God’s Spirit working through his Word has the ability to calm our restless spirits.

Open the Book and join the conversation.

Body of Christ in Newaygo to Close

*Rev. Clayton H. Bates
Director for Evangelical Mission*

Body of Christ began as a New Start in 1999 – 2000, with Dar and Dottie Johnson as its first developers. The new ministry began with a spirit of hope, projecting 150 members in two years and financial self-reliance in three years. The journey turned out to be more challenging than it appeared to be at first.

More recently, in December of 2006 Lay Minister Carrie (Stine) Wygmans and Pastor Scott Swix began as full-time developers of both Body of Christ and Hope Community in Rockford. Carrie and Scott brought enthusiasm and faithful leadership to Body of Christ. While Body of Christ was making a positive contribution to the community, the hopeful goals set back in 1999-2000 of self-reliance and growth still proved to be elusive, and the decision was made to close.

We are thankful to God that the people of Body of Christ will continue to be members of the body of Christ as they make their way to fellowship with other congregations, bringing their gifts and strengths to full-communion congregations. We are also thankful to each congregation in our synod, especially Body of Christ's mission partners, who through your offerings have financially supported Body of Christ and through your prayers have spiritually supported Body of Christ. We are also thankful to the churchwide expression of

the ELCA for financial support through the years.

Among that which we celebrate with the people of Body of Christ are the 10,000 pounds of food collected for food drives, free firewood ministry, Vacation Bible Schools, backpacks and supplies for area children, and Word and Sacrament ministry characterized by welcome and acceptance.

The last worship service is scheduled for Sunday, January 31st, with Bishop John D. Schleicher presiding.

Peace Lutheran in Holland Begins Health Ministry

Peace Lutheran in Holland received a \$40,000 three-year grant from Wheat Ridge Ministries to begin a new health ministry called Healthy Bodies, Peace of Mind. Led by Peace's parish nurse, Linda Hutchison, the ministry will provide five 8-week sessions throughout 2010 to offer exercise, classes, and prayer to persons suffering from chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. These participants will come mostly from local free clinics.

Wheat Ridge is an independent Lutheran foundation that makes grants to congregations and agencies to provide new and innovative care ministries. For more information, visit www.wheatridge.org.

Foundations for BeFriender Ministry

Calvary Lutheran Church, Lansing, MI

Monday-Thursday, April 12-15, 2010

8:30am-5:30pm each day

“Foundations for BeFriender Ministry” is a workshop for leaders who want to implement and maintain a listening ministry of lay pastoral care in their church. The small size of this highly interactive workshop allows workshop leaders to address the specific needs and questions of participants.

You are invited to send a team of two to five leaders from your congregation to attend the workshop. The team includes at least one paid staff person, and one or more lay volunteers.

Workshop Outcomes

- Understand the three primary roles of program leaders: trainer, facilitator, and administrator.
- Have a roadmap and the tools for implementing and maintaining the program.
- Understand the role of the BeFriender by experiencing the training you will ultimately deliver to lay volunteers in your church.
- Gain insights from workshop leaders who serve as models of effective training techniques.
- Learn skills for facilitating ongoing skill-building and spiritual growth for BeFrienders.

Registration

\$799 for first registrant from church or organization (\$749 if full payment received by 3/15/10)

\$649 for each additional registrant (\$599 if full payment received by 3/15/10)

Included in the fee

- Full set of program leader materials for each participant (valued at \$112.50)
- Beverages, light continental breakfast, lunch and afternoon snacks each day.

Further information, including the registration form, is available at www.befrienderministry.org. Click on “Foundations Workshop.” Here you can find the registration form, as well as additional information that will be helpful.

It's a New Year!

*Judy Enger
Synod Hunger Team*

Do New Year's resolutions work for you? Yes? No? Change isn't easy. This year, I'm making a resolution that I will keep. Here's a little background.

For many years, my brother-in-law has prepared our Thanksgiving turkey on a grill outside. In the last few years, we have chosen to prepare two small turkeys rather than a big one—it takes less roasting time and two small turkeys fit into the grill better than one large turkey.

This year, for some reason the charcoal didn't get hot enough, the turkeys did not cook as quickly as expected, and we started the meal, late, with the one bird that was done. The other turkey remained on the grill. By the time the meal was finished, so was the second turkey. No one wanted to eat m-o-r-e turkey. What to do with a whole, roasted turkey? Everyone could take home leftovers or we could take it to the Open Door, a local soup kitchen. The Open Door was the winner.

I bundled the bird in foil, added a large bag of leftover mashed potatoes, and my husband took it to the Open Door on Friday morning. He went in and said, "I have a turkey and mashed potatoes to donate." The response was, "Oh! Is it cooked?" "Yes, it is a whole, roasted turkey." "How did you know we needed food? Thank you." was the reply. The response really brought us up short.

My resolution is that next year we will again cook two turkeys, but one will be designated, from the beginning, for the Open Door (I am writing this resolution on the calendar!). We know there are people who are hungry in our community, in our country, in the world. Yet, it took some nerve to actually take the turkey to the Open Door. Many things are like that, it takes a little "push" to move ahead. Christ says, "Feed my sheep." That's our little push.

My prayer as we begin this new year is one of gratitude for you and all you do to help people who are hungry, and it is also that more of us will feel "a little push" to reach out in faith to help people in need.

IRS Announces 2010 Standard Mileage Rates

The Internal Revenue Service recently issued the 2010 optional standard mileage rates used to calculate the deductible costs of operating an automobile for business, charitable, medical or moving purposes. Beginning on Jan. 1, 2010, the standard mileage rates for the use of a car (also vans, pickups or panel trucks) will be:

- 50 cents per mile for business miles driven
- 16.5 cents per mile driven for medical or moving purposes
- 14 cents per mile driven in service of charitable organizations

The new rates for business, medical and moving purposes are slightly lower than last year's. The mileage rates for 2010 reflect generally lower transportation costs compared to a year ago. For more information, visit www.irs.gov.

Making a Difference in the Month of May

Bishop Stephen Marsh
Southeast Michigan Synod

One of the exciting plans we have for this new year is having a Joint Synod Assembly with the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, which would bring together the ELCA expression from the entire lower peninsula of Michigan!

The theme of the Joint Assembly is “*For the Lord Loves Justice*,” taken from Psalm 37:28. It is a powerful theme, because it reminds us that God is for the things that make for right relationship in our lives together, and right relationship is what justice is all about. As we take seriously the fact that we are all brothers and sisters under the common parentage of God, and that God loves it when we treat each other equally – with righteousness and without prejudice on any level – we are practicing justice toward one another, because justice is about right relationship.

In times like these, where we tend to see the glass as half empty rather than as half full, we are tempted to protect what we feel we have and own, rather than share it with others.

Attitudes that concentrate on scarcity challenge the notion of justice among us, because we fear there just are not enough resources to go around. Those people and institutions that are the most vulnerable end up suffering the most – our children and the schools they attend, our elders and the services they depend on, those who are sick and the health care they count on, those who are unemployed and the ability of the economy to employ them again. These are just some of the things that make for justice that God would have our faith communities to consider as issues that truly matter.

There are many reasons why our coming together in a Joint Assembly with the North/West Lower MI Synod will be a wonderful opportunity to make a difference in the month of May:

- *It is an opportunity for us as a synod to gather together with one another.* Someone who deals with all three Michigan synods recently told me that our synod is the one that has the least amount of synodical gatherings. That is a trend that we can begin to change in 2010 by each

For the Lord Loves Justice **2010 Synod Assembly** **May 20-22, 2010** **Lansing Center**

This letter from Bishop Marsh to the Southeast Michigan Synod emphasizes the importance of full participation in the assembly. Please share this information with potential voting members and visitors.

Note that the assembly begins with a picnic lunch on the Capitol Lawn from 12pm-3pm on Thursday, May 20. This is an opportunity to meet face to face with your Senators and Representatives. Watch for details in the registration materials.

The budget for the assembly is being finalized during the next few weeks. The registration fees are expected to be \$100-\$110 per person (with meals) and \$50-\$60 per person (without meals).

Attendees are responsible for reserving their own lodging accommodations. Room blocks have been reserved at several hotels, at a rate of \$80-\$85/night (single or double occupancy). Note: The cost of lodging is *not* included in the aforementioned registration fees.

congregation being represented for the entire time of the Assembly. Lots of important communion and relationship building can take place among us if we make the commitment to be present. Begin to financially plan now to make a difference in the month of May.

- *It is an opportunity to build new and productive relationships with the people and ministries of the North/West Lower MI Synod.* Michigan needs to reinvent itself to survive, and that includes the ways that the ELCA does its business. This is a time of opportunity for the Church of Jesus Christ, because many need to hear – and are open to hear like never before – the good news of God’s love. Seeing how we Lutherans can cooperate with each other in that endeavor in the Lower Peninsula is a good and faithful use of our time and resources, and can make a difference in the month of May and beyond.
- *It is an opportunity to prayerfully be together around something that the Lord loves.* The Lord loves justice. Prayerfully considering how we can live and be in ways that make for justice among us can truly make a difference way beyond the month of May.

Let us be on the way together, toward May and beyond, in new partnerships, with new resources, with a renewed faith.

The North/West Lower Michigan Synod offices are moving the week of January 25. Here is some information to help us stay in touch during the transition.

New postal address (effective January 25, 2010)

North/West Lower Michigan Synod, 2900 N. Waverly Rd., Lansing MI 48906

Email addresses (remain the same)

Bishop John Schleicherjohnschleicher@mittensynod.org
Pastor Julie Baileyjuliebailey@mittensynod.org
Pastor Clay Bates (thru 1/31/10)claybates@mittensynod.org
Pastor Roger Hardy (beginning 1/19/10)rogerhardy@mittensynod.org
Sister Nancy Brousseau.....nancybrousseau@mittensynod.org
Rebecca Bossenbroek.....rebecca@mittensynod.org
Regina Miller.....reginaroyal@mittensynod.org
Margie Bauer.....margiebauer@mittensynod.org

Phone number (remains the same).....517-321-5066

Fax number (sharing with St. Stephen effective January 25, 2010).....517-321-2244

Office Hours (effective February 1, 2010).....8am to 5pm, Monday through Thursday

Downtime

We appreciate your patience as we move into our new space on January 25-27, 2010. We expect to be available by phone and email on January 28.