



**Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

**North/West Lower Michigan Synod**

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# The Bishop's Letter

**February 2010**

## Staying in Community

In the ongoing dialogue with congregations seeking to make faithful decisions about their membership in and commitment to the ELCA, my appreciation for the diverse convictions of our people has deepened. I am regularly reminded of the presence of God in these conversations, God in the tension and dissonance, God in the simultaneously intense, sometimes angry but also more often than not respectful way people share their convictions and questions.

I am grateful for the theology of the cross, for the revelation that, especially in the “Christ event,” we know God to be with us in the bleakest, seemingly most irreconcilable moments in our communal lives. As it is written in I Peter 1, we are being refined by fire, we who because of God’s love freely poured out on us, are more precious than gold.

In the fire we are pressed to articulate our highest values and our deepest convictions as we seek to stay in community. Among those values and convictions, I encourage you to keep in mind the following:

- No one of us is absolutely right on any issue with which we struggle.
- Every deeply held value, every conviction, should be rigorously tested by conversation and respectful debate within a loving community.
- At any moment the church, born of God, can be that loving community. It was in such community that the clearest, most abiding expressions of our faith were shaped, where decisions were made about which books would be in the canon we call the Bible, where interpretation of the written Word is the ongoing challenge in every time and place. Every congregation can be a microcosm, a local expression of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic community.
- At no time are we, as a community of Christ, bereft of God’s guiding Holy Spirit. Thus we are rendered less anxious, more centered in the salvific power of the crucified and risen Christ. Remembering the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are to make the best, albeit imperfect, decisions we can.
- There is room in every congregation, in this synod, in the churchwide expression of the ELCA for people with widely disparate convictions. But where Jesus is acknowledged

as Lord, there is not room for chronic rancor, for habitual mean-spiritedness. We witness powerfully to God's grace, not by agreeing on everything, but by our commitment to exemplify the beloved and loving community for which Jesus died.

- We honor those who have struggled mightily to stay but whose place in their spiritual journey prevents them from remaining in our particular expressions of the body of Christ. We trust that God wills to bless them and to use them in another expression of that body.

I encourage you to be rigorously committed to this church, to stay in the community of the ELCA in all three of its expressions, precisely because this church seeks to honor and respect all who belong to Jesus, and to share God's decision to bring salvation and abundant life to all people. As members of the ELCA, we have "gone on record" to affirm and cherish one another, to bear one another's burdens, challenging one another to be sure, but not demeaning each other's deeply held differing convictions.

Bishop John

## **Preparing for the Synod Assembly, May 20-22**

"Depart from evil, and do good; so you shall abide forever. For the LORD loves justice; he will not forsake his faithful ones." Psalm 37:27-28 (underlining mine)

First, dwell in the scriptures, perhaps using a concordance to visit those passages which include the word "justice." Include in your reading Deuteronomy 15:1-11, Psalm 146, and Leviticus 19:32-37.

Second, encourage assembly voting members and visitors to arrive in Lansing by noon on the 20<sup>th</sup>. We plan to begin with a picnic on the lawn of the Capitol, arranging conversations with your state representatives and senators. We'll be coaching you ahead about areas you may want to talk about with these folks whose call it is to serve in what Martin Luther called, "the kingdom on the left."

Third, plan to stay until noon on Saturday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>. It is important that we have time together at the end to reflect on and say "yes" to our "marching orders" before we return to our own communities. We will have the joy of welcoming and saying "goodbye" to the voting members and visitors from the Southeast Michigan Synod, including their new bishop, Steven Marsh. This will be our first joint synod assembly since the formation of the ELCA 22 years ago.

Fourth, we will be blessed by the presence of Bishop Margaret Payne from the New England Synod and Carlos Pena, from Galveston, Texas, who is the vice president of the ELCA. Pray for

them and help us celebrate the inviting, empowering Holy Spirit, calling us to “do justice” in and beyond the lower peninsula of Michigan.

Fifth, we try to keep the costs of the synod assembly as low as possible, but even so it may seem more manageable for your congregation to start setting aside some funds for this already this month. We will communicate with you in the March newsletter the recipients for the two special offerings received at the assembly.

Bishop John

## **Making Us One Update**

Thank you for your participation with your gifts and/or pledges for our synod’s *Making Us One* campaign. This is to update you on our progress toward living into the vision of a Campus for Mission & Ministry.

At a recent gathering of conference deans and the advisory team for the Center for Mission & Ministry, we were moved by the power and relevance of the exodus and wilderness stories. Our prayers in 2009 were that by the end of the year we would have raised \$1,500,000 in gifts and pledges in order to secure a loan from the ELCA Mission Investment Fund. This would enable us to begin construction of a campus at Old 27 and Webb Road in DeWitt in the spring of 2010. The reality is that we received \$260,440 in pledges, \$59,228 of which has been received in cash gifts. We find ourselves in the wilderness, not able to move directly to the realization of our prayers. As the Israelites were surely not abandoned in the wilderness but could not realize the hoped-for “straight shot” to a settled place, so, we believe, for us.

Here is what we want you to know:

- 1) Your gifts already given are held in a dedicated interest-bearing *Making Us One* account. As pledges are honored and new gifts received, these too will be reserved in this dedicated account.
- 2) The purpose for the Center for Mission & Ministry, to be a catalyst for growth and renewal, connection and collaboration, remains valid and compelling. We believe that God is leading us to re-examine how this purpose for the whole synod can be visibly expressed both now and in the future. In the next couple of months we will gather representatives from the Center Advisory Team, from Christ United, from the Synod Council, from Living Water Ministries, from our conference deans, from ecumenical partners, from Kairos, and from synod staff to participate in this discernment. Recommendations for moving forward will be prepared for the Synod Council and for the Synod Assembly.

- 3) The architectural drawings for the Campus are complete and have been paid for. Any major departure from the building plans would come as a recommendation to the Synod Assembly.
- 4) As we made *Making Us One* visits, we learned that while this was a good time to proceed because building costs were depressed, because a number of congregations and individuals were struggling to make ends meet, they were reluctant to make a new financial commitment. Some questioned whether or not they would regularly use this new resource enough to justify their investment. Thus, financial realities and questions about usage of the Campus offset our hope to build while costs remained low. In the short term, we have the support of the Synod Council to invest in communication hardware and software (with permission of *Making Us One* donors) that will help us better connect with one another. We will also seek to live into the purpose of the Center with a variety of gatherings for spiritual formation and for equipping leaders of our congregations at Christ United, at St. Stephen (new site of the synod office), and at other sites around the synod.
- 5) Our intent is to be in touch with all donors (and potential donors) on a quarterly basis during the coming year as we “figure out” together the shape and meaning of this time in the wilderness.

Again, thank you for your gifts and/or pledges to *Making Us One*. We remain committed to a deeper way to strengthen and support one another in the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, to grow in our relationship with God in Jesus Christ, to better witness to God’s enduring grace in our ecumenical and interfaith partnerships. God is making us one.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop John

### **For reflection and prayer:**

*When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer; for God thought, “If the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt.” So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. Exodus 13:17*

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness. Luke 4:1*

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Center for Mission & Ministry News and Updates

Nancy Brousseau, OP

Center for Mission & Ministry Facilitator

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I have been in conversation with Dr. Dahill and our decision was to go with only the two events, given her time and the travel involved. So, we will offer the Friday, April 23 afternoon program for Pastors and Lay Leaders and then on Saturday, April 24, anyone who is interested may join the on-going group involved in the Foundations of Spirituality Program offered that day at St. Stephen on N. Waverly in Lansing. For this full day session there will be required readings suggested by our presenter, as well as two recommended books.

Here are final details on the two events. Mark your calendar – you won't want to miss this.

### **Spirituality in Lutheran Perspective**

*Friday, April 23, 2010, 2pm – 5pm*

*Immanuel, Mt. Pleasant*

**Donation:** \$10/person or \$35/group of 3 or more, payable to North/West Lower Michigan Synod - with "Spirituality" on the memo line. Send to attention of Nancy Brousseau at the Synod office.

**Topic:** This afternoon event will provide an overview of key themes in Lutheran spirituality oriented especially around questions of faithful discipleship, leadership, and congregational life in the 21st century. We will explore insights from Martin Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and other past and present Lutherans to engage these questions, looking particularly at the shape and form of Christian community in a post-Christian context; the place of prayer (and forms of prayer) in healthy leadership; and how our tradition engages the arts, creativity, the body, the world in life-giving ways.

### **Foundations of Christian Spirituality**

*Saturday, April 24, 2010*

*St. Stephen, Lansing*

9:30am – 4:30pm

**Donation:** \$20/person or \$55/group of 3 or more includes lunch/breaks and materials (NOT the books that will be recommended –these are a participant expense.)

You can register for this event by sending a check payable to North/West Lower Michigan Synod - with "Foundations" on the memo line. Send to attention of Nancy Brousseau.

Once you register a packet of readings will be sent to you with additional details you may need to know in order to prepare for the day.

#### Recommended Books:

- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together & Psalms: Prayerbook of the Bible*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, volume 5. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther's Spirituality*, ed. Philip Krey and Peter Krey. Classics of Western Spirituality Series. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007.

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. The articles that will be sent in advance speak to four aspects of Luther's spirituality 1. the affective/erotic dimension of Luther's spirituality, a dimension most people are surprised to find out about; 2. a biography of Bonhoeffer as well as major spiritual themes in *Life Together* for today; 3. on discernment; and 4. Lutheran eco-theology.



## Earthkeeping News & Updates

Kim Winchell, Diaconal Minister

[kwinchellm@aol.com](mailto:kwinchellm@aol.com)

As I sit here at my lap top, pondering what to write for this month's column, the sun is shining and the temperatures are rising, as we head into a classic January thaw.

And it is a mere few days past the massive, utterly catastrophic earthquake in Haiti. Kind of makes it hard to think of anything else for awhile, doesn't it?

Amid the countless images of death and destruction, we look to and seize upon those small glimmers of hope ... the wide array of other countries offering what aid they can, the near-miraculous rescues of some of those buried, yet still alive under rubble, the self-less acts of compassion and caring for others.

We will see, no doubt, humanity at both its best, and its worst, in this event. At our best we understand, and live from, our inter-relationship with one another. At our best, we live from Christ's example of love and compassion. Here are some words from the "Charter for Compassion" that are resonating with me this day:

*"The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the center of our world and put another there, and to honor the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.*

*"We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity."* - An excerpt from the internationally-developed, multi-faith "Charter for Compassion" (2009) [www.charterforcompassion.org](http://www.charterforcompassion.org)

Indeed, that "deep interdependence" extends to all of creation, so I also want to share just a few earthkeeping items with you this month:

(1) Dawn Smith of our synod EarthKeeping Opportunities Team will be offering a monthly "EKO Tip" in the congregational insert publication. If you have a personal favorite earthkeeping tip you'd like to share with others, please send it along to Dawn at [smith8286@att.net](mailto:smith8286@att.net).

(2) An Earth Day Sunday worship resource, "Sacred Spaces and an Abundant Life: Worship Spaces as Stewardship," is available at [www.elca.org/caringforcreation](http://www.elca.org/caringforcreation). I have a few hard copies of this resource; let me know if you'd like me to mail you one.

(3) NEW! Several "Climate Change, Poverty and Hunger" excellent, easy-to-use teaching resources are also now available at [www.elca.org/caringforcreation](http://www.elca.org/caringforcreation). In addition, I have a limited number of hard copies of both the DVD "Climate Change and Hunger in Nicaragua" and the accompanying discussion guide, "As long as the earth endures."

May the Holy Spirit stoke the fires of our compassion, and move us all in fresh ways to care for "the neighbor" and all of God's creation!

## HIPAA Guidelines—“I’m so confused!”

Some of us can remember the good old days when hospitals would call and let us know that parishioners are in the hospital. For most of us, those days are gone. We are now relying on word of mouth, primarily family members or the patients themselves.

Visitation is important to ministry and this vital opportunity to provide Word and Sacrament ministry to the sick has gotten lost for some as an unintentional result of HIPAA or our misunderstandings.

I draw attention to some resources:

1. Seeds of the Parish, January-February 2010 page 7. Provides answers to some common misunderstandings. If you didn't receive this, you can download it from [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org).
2. At the ELCA website, under Office of the Secretary, Legal Issues, there are many helpful resources, including a section on Questions about the work of the clergy.
3. [http://www.lutherservices.org/pastoral\\_care\\_and\\_hipaa](http://www.lutherservices.org/pastoral_care_and_hipaa) offers resources, including a bulletin insert with information that is helpful to HIPAA.

HIPAA does not prevent prayers, visitation from the pastor, and pastoral care. It does limit the information that the hospital can provide you. However, the person will likely tell us what we need to know in order to provide pastoral care. I might still be confused, but I will continue to provide Word and Sacrament in the time of need.



LOST by Pastor Julie Bailey

Will anyone find me? Does anybody care?  
So many trials, it doesn't seem fair.  
Lost and alone, trapped in fear.  
Surrounded by people, can no one hear?  
Everyone ignores me, no one understands  
How this life that I've been given has gotten so out of hand.  
Yet I know there is one who listens to my cries  
Who knows everything about me, with whom I need not lie.  
For when I am lost and feel so all alone,  
I'm not, he's always with me, with Christ I am found.

## Synod Office Relocated

On January 25, the office of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod moved to its new location.

- New postal address: 2900 N. Waverly Rd., Lansing MI 48906.
- New fax number: 517-321-2644.

Please update your records. Thank you!

## **Gathering 2009 Big Success!**

On December 27, over 700 youth and adults from the North/West Lower Michigan Synod and the Southeast Michigan Synod gathered for the Gathering. “Lost” was the theme, focusing on how even as Christians, we can feel lost. Through small group study, the message of main speaker Jay Gamlien, the music, and the mass gathering, youth and adults experienced the sense of being found by Christ. Summer Robinson (Feast of Victory, Acme) served as co-convener, along with Niko Rombes from the Southeast Michigan Synod. The event was held at a new venue this year, the Radisson Hotel in downtown Lansing.

Plans have already begun for Gathering 2010. Co-conveners for 2010 will be Charles Dempsey (Settlement/Gowan) and Emily Gietzen from Southeast Michigan Synod. Mark your calendars for December 27-30, 2010. See you there!!!!

## **A Change of Heart**

*Judy Enger*

*Synod Hunger Team Member*

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, on February 17 and continues for 40 days, not including Sundays, until the Saturday before Easter Sunday. Friends may ask, “What are you giving up for Lent?” or “Are you going to fast?” Do you even fast anymore?

Lent is a season when we turn toward God and think about how our lives need to change. This is also a time to remember our baptism, and how that gift gives us a new start every day. ([The Lutheran Handbook](#))

Some people choose to give up a particular food during Lent. This has been done throughout history. If, as we progress through Lent to Easter, we are to turn toward God and think about how our lives reflect our faith, then our “fast” needs to be something more than the food we eat. Perhaps we should strive to change our hearts, not our waists, as we reflect on all that Christ has done for us.

As we approach Lent, I’d like to challenge you to a change of heart. Jesus said: “You give them something to eat.” Matthew 14:16. Bring 40 items (for each day of Lent) for a local Food Pantry or make a daily offering to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal during Lent. As your heart changes so will the lives of the poor.