



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

North/West Lower Michigan Synod

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The Bishop's Letter

July 2010

And I Will Give You Rest

I write this just a few days before Phylis and I begin our vacation, spending time with our family and indulging ourselves in rest. We promised each other that when we felt weary, we would honor that weariness, we would rest. In recent months, our lives have been filled with schedules that we suspect make us more likely to push beyond wise limits, beyond the “light burden” Jesus intended for us. So these couple of weeks off will be a gift we hope to use well.

With you I know, however, that two weeks or four weeks or even if we are blessed with a three-month sabbatical can't substitute for the rest into which Jesus invites us every day and every week. My dad, a fine pastor, administrator, husband, and father, found resting difficult. I don't remember him taking a regular day off. And there was always one more project to be tackled. I watched and learned from my dad; consequently it doesn't come naturally for me either, just “being” without feeling like I'm wasting time.

But I am learning to cherish this gift. I am learning that even a very brief nap in the middle of the day adds a striking freshness to the remainder of my day. I am learning anew what I discovered early in my public ministry: God provides timely, joyful moments that enrich us so much that all the intense, demanding, challenging work God also gives does not overwhelm us.

In the two weeks before our vacation I will have presided at three ordinations, of Sue Hand, Rachel Laughlin, and Chris Laughlin. (This morning, June 20, I was privileged to install Sue as pastor of Zion, Saginaw.) Not pure rest, perhaps, but what joyful events! Hardly rest in the snoozing sense, but rest nonetheless, because in ordinations I hear so much grace. At the end of the promises made by the ordinand, I get to declare, “Almighty God, who has given you the will to do these things, graciously give you the strength and compassion to perform them.” Inspiring, transforming, making holy the multiple tasks and lists of commitments that comprise our faithful service are these precious words, “God...graciously give you the strength and compassion to perform them.”

And then, following the intercessions, a stole is presented with these words: *Receive this stole as a sign of your work, and live in obedience to the Lord Jesus, serving his people and remembering his promise: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:28-30)

Because all who are baptized are ordained for service to God's children and to all of creation, these words of Jesus are priceless regardless of the shape of our callings. They mean that Jesus will carry us through the hardest, most grief-stricken times of our lives, so that those times are not too hard, so that we are not crushed or rendered useless.

Phylis and I are ready for a vacation, for a string of "lightened" days. I pray that you are given opportunity for such a gracious provision too if you are weary and carrying heavy burdens. But I also pray that in the midst of your work, you are given moments of fulfillment and joy, learning as I have learned that God knows precisely when we need such moments. Surely that is the intent of the strong and compassionate God who in Jesus is inextricably involved in our lives, wanting us to be rested, wanting us to be whole.

Bishop John

A Summer of Ordinations

Our synod will be especially blessed with a number of newly ordained pastors. Please pray for them as they begin their journeys as ministers of Word and Sacrament.

- Sue Hand was ordained on June 12 and installed as Pastor of Zion, Saginaw on June 20.
- Rachel Laughlin was ordained on June 19 and has been called to serve as Pastor of St. Matthew, Bridgeport.
- Chris Laughlin was ordained on June 24 and has been called to serve as Pastor of Hope, Marlette.
- Jacob Lehman will be ordained on July 31 and has been called to serve as Associate Pastor of Trinity, Kalamazoo.
- Wayne Shearier has been called to serve as Pastor of Holy Trinity, Niles and will be ordained on August 14.
- Aaron Werner has been called to serve as Associate Pastor at St. Luke's, Grand Rapids effective October 1. He will be ordained on September 19.

Companionship with ELC-PNG

Below is Bishop Schleicher's June 16, 2010 letter to Rev. Qogi Zongoreng

Dear President Zongoreng,

Today Biama Kanasa boards a plane in Lansing heading back home to Port Moresby. From our perspective, it has been a very rich three weeks. Biama has met literally dozens of church leaders and members and traveled throughout much of our synod territory. He will have many pictures and stories to share with you and with the congregations of the district.

Yesterday, he and I crafted an eight-point proposal to be reviewed both by your district leaders, especially the Poroman Committee, and by our synod leaders, especially the Global Mission Committee and a PNG task force. The proposal reflects, I hope, your own proposal that we seek to send a ministry team, a pastor and a skilled lay person, to help with leadership training and with "basic theology" to help "meet the challenges of the changing time."

It also expresses our idea that you and your leaders would identify a pastor or evangelist who could come to help us better reach out to people here in Michigan who have no church home and no conscious relationship with Jesus Christ. You will note my hope that you can come to the North/West Lower Michigan Synod sometime within the next two years. Likewise, it expresses my intent to make a return visit to the Papua District, perhaps in 2012.

It was a pleasure to have Biama in our midst. He was an able witness to the good work God is doing in ELC-PNG, and especially in your district. Pastor Gary Hansen reminded Biama and me earlier this week that our covenant relationship must always be mindful of the ministries of the whole ELC-PNG and the ELCA. So, as you are able, I hope you will convey to Kinim and to your new bishop both our joy and confidence about this new covenant partnership and our desire that our mutual accompaniment is always respectful of the larger churches to which we belong.



Earthkeeping News & Updates

Kim Winchell, Diaconal Minister

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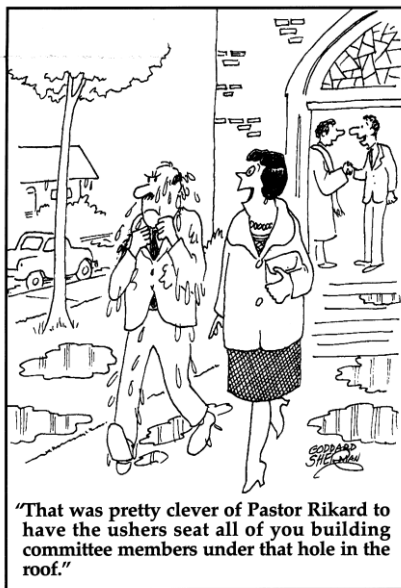
Continuing the Drama: Gushing With Eco-Grace

Rev. Krehl Stringer

Earthkeeping Opportunities (EKO) Team

If, because of the one man's [i.e., the earthling, Adam's] trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:17)

Within this biosphere God established to be our sanctuary, God (alongside human creativity) has cleverly positioned us to behold a certain “error of our ways” a mile beneath the surface of the Gulf of Mexico. As if the goings on above the surface were not already enough (an oil rig raging hotter than hell, burnt offerings and unholy fire rising up from its steel horns, the eyes of survivors bleary with anger and grief)...As if these surface horrors were not already enough to expose the vanities in which we labor (Eccl. 1:14), we have these deepwater images: a failed blowout preventer, crude oil in the thousands of barrels daily* spewing out of the depths of our greed to slicken our oceans, to disrupt our ecosystems, to smother our wildlife, to fuel our consumption.



from *The Joyful Noiseletter*
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Perhaps you've seen them, too. I behold from my easy-chair in high definition these silent *live-feed* images of billowing death (literally, fossil remains, ancient dead stuff!), and something like the sound of sheer silence crushes me (1Kgs 19:12-13; Job 4:12-17), compels me to veil my face and give answer to God, “What are you doing here, mortal?” The question is acutely penetrating, is it not, Adam/Eve-shaking?

God's unveiling drills deep down into the very *raison d'être* of human existence, challenges the very premise of the human experiment: whether we'd love God (Deut. 6:1-6; Mt. 22:36-38) and conserve creation (Gen. 1:28; 2:15; Mt. 22:39-40), or exploit them for selfish gain. History proves how death has exercised dominion.

But failed experiments are not a lost cause on God: “God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8) The cross, as it were, became for the world the rig of salvation—an eminently uncappable, top-kill-defying, planet-engulfing wellhead gushing with eco-grace. Admittedly, the symbol is difficult, paradoxical, even...comical. Yet that is the gospel we contemplate, the life-giving role into which we’ve been cast. (Lk. 9:23; Rom. 14:7-9)

Somewhere between the comic and the tragic (that is, the tension between the happy and unhappy ending) lies the human condition. No doubt, those who lived before Christ could have managed a wry smile at the tragicomic absurdities of our sin—the vanities we pursue, the caves we dig ourselves into, the golden calves we idolize, the Edens we desecrate. Irony is nothing new, of course, but now its supreme expression—the last laugh—surely is. Such is the dramatic turn of events we have in Christ crucified—an apocalypse of joyous release from the dominion of death. (1Cor. 15:51-58) Serious comedy this denouement is! Enter humanity, stage right...



Eyeing the *Joyful Noiseletter* cartoon, we staid, decorous Lutherans might even let slip a chuckle, observing in the rain-soaked man (we’ll call him Adam) a humorous image of ourselves: the begrudgingly baptized, dripping wet with grace in spite of ourselves, incessantly nagged by pastor and people to do what we’re called to do. But finally it comes down to those silent reflections (confounded puddles everywhere!): in pew and pulpit, around font and table, on the sidewalk, throughout the neighborhood, wherever the Spirit has cumulated its nimbus of witnesses. (Heb. 12:1-2)

See, the billowing of such storm clouds can be quite dramatic: precipitating praise for Creator as they deluge creation with an ever-flowing love, gushing with eco-grace. Yet it’s the after-effects (Gen. 9:12-17)—the rainbows and puddles—that stand in Christ-like silence against all passivity, excuses and fears. We mark the storms and reflect on their passing. The thunder is in the silence: “What are *you* doing here, mortal?”

When not uneasily seated as armchair critics, we earthlings would rather rehearse than perform the life-giving dominion God intended to be our livelihood. (Eph. 2:10) But now, having received abundant life in Christ (Jn. 10:10), mightn’t we finally begin trusting “that all things [play] together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose?” (Rom. 8:28)

Perhaps in response to those tragic deepwater images, we might begin to imagine a manifold witness to death’s diminishing dominion—that is, a billowing response that *live-feeds* the gospel, gushing with eco-grace. It’s time, I’d say, for some serious stand-up comedy!

* As of this writing, estimates range from 35-60K barrels of oil daily since April 20th.

2010 Synod Assembly Election Results

Synod Council

Clergy Male

- Pastor Dennis B. Smith, Jr. (Messiah, Constantine)

Lay Female

- Christine Allen (Trinity, Kalamazoo)
- Iris Boettcher (Bethlehem, Grand Rapids)
- Norma Friesner (Emanuel, Ludington)

Youth

- Charlotte Kamphuis (St. Paul, Greenville)

Center for Mission & Ministry Advisory Board

- Karen Eichelberger (First, Muskegon)
- Roger Marks (Trinity, Grand Rapids)

2011 Churchwide Assembly Voting Members

Clergy Female

- Pastor Sarah M. Friesen-Carper (Peace, Charlotte)
- Pastor Sherry E. McGuffin (Cross of Christ, Petoskey)

Clergy Male

- Pastor Justin A. Grimm (Advent, Lake Ann)
- Pastor Jim Foster (Good Shepherd, Holland)

Lay Female

- Vicky Carron (Trinity, Grand Rapids)
- Sandra Foster (Good Shepherd, Holland)

Lay Male

- William (Bill) Duggan (St. Peter, Battle Creek)
- Dennis Frank (Grace, East Tawas)

Person of Color or Whose Primary Language Is Other Than English

- Christine Mwanyika (Faith, Grand Rapids)

Youth

- Elliott M. Drake (Cross of Christ, Petoskey)