



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**
God's work. Our hands.

North/West Lower Michigan Synod
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The Bishop's Letter

January 2011

Imagining Eternal Life in 2011

The biblical revelation of eternal life given to us in Jesus Christ is a wondrous gift. Eternal life means that throughout this new year, we will never be without the presence of Christ. In the sacramental language of the Small Catechism, we will never be without forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Daring to believe this, I invite you to imagine with me what eternal life might look like in our synod in 2011.

Here's what I see:

- Five congregations uniquely embraced five congregations in the Papua District of Papua New Guinea.
- Several congregations welcomed, with appropriate safeguards, women and men who have completed their prison sentences.
- We visited and walked with the Lutheran Church in Honduras as its members faced daily threats to their safety and prayed for courage to address gross violations of human rights in this beleaguered nation.
- Each of our eight geographic conferences found new ways to listen carefully and regularly to the voices of the people in the pews (and in their communities), witnessed the light of Christ shining in their hearts.
- 30 or more of our congregations conducted energy audits as tangible, practical next steps toward caring for creation (and saving 20-25% on their utility bills).
- We celebrated at our Synod Assembly progress toward eliminating racism, a sin which our synod has steadfastly addressed, especially in the greater Kalamazoo area, for over a decade.
- Six of our congregations engaged the LSSM month-long One Church, One Child, One Family discernment process and identified and supported new adoptive families.
- We celebrated growing numbers of congregations planting, cultivating, harvesting gardens for the common good.
- We decided together whether or not "it seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit" to take further steps toward merger with the Southeast Michigan Synod.
- We stepped up support for our newest mission congregation, Advent in Lake Ann, so they could proceed with their first building project for sake of ongoing growth.
- Living Water Ministries continued to thrive with its new director, C.J. Clark, and with renewed loyalty from our congregations to send their children to Stony Lake or Michi-Lu-Ca for a week of remarkable grace.
- We persevered in finding a sustainable way to support the social ministry of the Lutheran Church in Latvia through their Diaconia Center.

- Trinity Seminary, Capital University, and Wittenberg University all commended our renewed prayers and financial support for their students, some of whom we often prayed for by name.
- God answered our prayers that the conflicts and lingering tensions we faced in light of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly decisions would result in deeper respect and love for one another.
- We made and cultivated new friendships among ecumenical and interfaith partners, seeking with them to enhance and multiply resources for the ministry of reconciliation.
- We celebrated the creation of the first two “synodical regional hubs” growing out of the Center for Mission & Ministry, and the *Making Us One* campaign, helping us to better connect with one another with the gift of new communication technologies, to grow in biblical literacy, to be more deeply grounded in the Gospel.
- A year-end survey revealed that the vast majority of lay and ordained leaders in our synod reported being better equipped for ministry, growing in grace, mercy, and peace in this most challenging of times.

Thus I imagine eternal life in 2011, humble enough to know it surely won’t be exactly like the descriptions above, but bold enough to believe that God will provide abundant, visible, heart and mind and hands expressions of Jesus, whose body we pray we will be for the world every time we leave his table.

Our Best Wishes...

to Rebecca Bossenbroek, Executive Assistant for Administration, who concluded her work on our behalf on December 22. Rebecca, who recently received a bachelor’s degree in business administration, will begin her new employment with a Lansing area CPA firm. Over the nearly six years she has been with us, Rebecca helped us to grow significantly in our calling to be a “middle judicatory,” the supportive connection between the ELCA churchwide and our congregations and ministry leaders “on the ground.” We will miss her. We wish her well as she moves into this new utilization of her many gifts.

You’re From Michigan!

During the Third Week in Advent, seven ELCA bishops met in D.C. to learn how we might bear public witness in the coming year to God’s revealed will regarding hunger and poverty and the stewardship of creation. We met with Katherine Haley, the policy advisor for the new House majority leader, John Boehner, with USDA officials, Dallas Tonsager, Under Secretary for Rural Development, and Max Finberg, the Director of the Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and with senior EPA officials.

A high moment for me came at a reception our ELCA Washington Office gave for government and interfaith leaders. I was introduced to Dr. Sayyid Syeed, the national director of the Office for Interaith and Community Alliances of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). “You’re from Michigan, he exclaimed.” Dr. Syeed knew about and applauded our forthcoming Winter Leadership Event (January 16-18), knows well our presenter, Michael Trice, and was thrilled that we are taking important steps toward understanding and connecting with members of the other Abrahamic faiths. “You’re from Michigan!” he exclaimed. He thanked me for the hope we are bringing to overcome fear and isolation and hatred.

His co-worker, Dr. Elsanousi, Director of Communications and Community Outreach for the ISNA and a native of Sudan, stirred in me the hope that God could do a new thing right here in Michigan as our Sudanese Christ Lutheran congregation under development is called to take brave steps to self-sufficiency. What if God used this congregation to witness to the falling of cruel and violent walls that too often have resulted in war and bloodshed in Sudan? [Please note that there are still a few days left to register for the Leadership Event. Call the synod office for details.]

Bishop Schleicher

Ordinations, Installations and Retirements

Pastor Tom Zollman officially retired on September 1, 2010, and recently concluded a term of Interim Ministry at Faith Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids. Join us in thanking him for his faithful service to many congregations in our synod:

- St. John's, Baroda
- University, East Lansing
- Faith, Grand Rapids
- St. Paul, Greenville
- Christ, Michigan Center
- Immanuel, Mt. Pleasant
- Cross, Pigeon
- St. John, Saginaw
- Peace, Sparta

When the synod office learns of plans for celebrations and festivities, the information will be shared in this publication. In the meantime, cards may be sent to Pastor Tom at 3522 Bayberry Drive NW, Grand Rapids MI 49544.

Pastor Dan Deutsch concludes his service as Interim Minister with **Bethlehem, Traverse City**, and retires (again) on December 31, 2010.

Michelle Werner will be ordained on Saturday, January 22, 2pm, at St. Paul, East Lansing. Michelle has accepted a call as Associate Pastor from Holy Cross, Livonia. Rostered leaders are invited to arrive 30 minutes early to vest (red) and process.

Pastor Elizabeth Retz will be installed as Pastor of **St. Timothy, Midland** at 9:30am on Sunday, January 23, 2010. Rostered leaders who are able to attend should arrive 30 minutes early to vest (green) and process.

Emily (Wineland) Werner will be ordained on Sunday, January 30, 3:30 p.m. at Zion, Chelsea. Emily has accepted a call as Associate Pastor of St Luke's, Grand Rapids. Rostered leaders are invited to arrive 30 minutes early to vest (red) and process. (Installation to be announced.)



Earthkeeping News & Updates

Kim Winchell, Diaconal Minister

kwinchellm@aol.com

January in Michigan - what better time to think about how we heat our homes and church buildings, and how we might do better with energy expenses in the future (not to mention, be kinder and gentler to creation at the same time). Here are a few online resources that may help.

The EPA has a lot of energy stewardship information at these two sites:

[Congregations : ENERGY STAR](#) [Energy Stewardship Action List : ENERGY STAR](#)

Also, a "Michigan Energy Efficiency Network", supported by the State of Michigan, has been launched to help local governments, schools, and businesses save time, effort, and energy. The MichEEN is a tool for sharing and creating energy efficiency strategies. Some of the info may be applicable for churches, or at least be a place to exchange information and ask questions on various blogs (for you technical savvy church folk out there). www.micheen.org

Save the Date!

I am hoping to reschedule an Energy Stewardship Workshop for April 16, 2011 in the Lansing area. Stay tuned for more information next month.

Yale Divinity School resource:

If you'd like a regular "digest" of collected religious news items on earthkeeping and eco-theology events and resources, check out the e-newsletter from the Yale Divinity School's "Forum on Religion and Ecology" at www.yale.edu/religionandecology.

They have an archive of many items, including resource pages on climate change which lift up the crucial roles that religions must play in constructing ethical worldviews for interacting with other people, species, and the environment in order to serve as a moral force for environmental action at <http://fore.research.yale.edu/climate-change>. The page has three sections:

- 1) Statements from World Religions on Climate Change
- 2) Climate Change Science
- 3) Climate Change Ethics

Peace to you, Peace to the Earth!

Epiphany---Who is Jesus? COME AND SEE

Pastor Roger Hardy, Director for Evangelical Mission

The gospel text for January 9, second Sunday after the Epiphany, is John 1:29-42, in which there is this line from Jesus, COME AND SEE.

Jesus invites his first disciples to know him through ‘abiding’ with him and witnessing for themselves his active presence in the world. The scripture readings in Epiphany are aimed at teaching us ‘who’ Jesus is as the One sent by God. This also is an excellent time to be inviting guests/ visitors to worship with us so that too can hear from themselves who Jesus is and can hear His invitation to come and abide in Him.

As you plan to invite new people to join you in bible study/worship/choir/fellowship, be mindful that they don’t know the ‘house rules’ or customs that often have become so much a part of our church culture. All too often we still hear that a new comer sat in the ‘wrong’ seat, or that the chair is reserved for someone else. All too often we still hear that a newcomer can enter and leave our sanctuary or bible studies and no one speaks to them or engages them in conversation.

A few years ago I invited five contextual education students from Luther seminary to come to our church on a Sunday morning, to adult class and worship. I asked them to report their experiences to our church council. Needless to say, this gave us valuable information about us that we were too blind to notice. Yes, our church did pride itself on being ‘friendly and welcoming’, but after this experience we learned new ways to move out of our comfort zone.

To BE Jesus centered is to be ready for someone new to come and sit beside us in order to hear about the One sent by God for the sake of world. The invitation from Jesus is for all of us toCOME AND SEE...

Long-Time Outreach Committee Member Bids Farewell

Please join me in thanking Peter Hansen as he concludes his service with the Outreach Committee. His words below reflect the meaning and fulfillment he experienced in this role. Is there a synod committee through which you might use your gifts? Call me at (517) 321-5066 if you would like more information. Pastor Hardy

Six years of spiritual enlightenment – this benefit sums up my experience of having served two terms as a member of the Synod’s Outreach Committee. I am a retired aerospace engineer, having spent many rewarding years making small but significant contributions to understanding our environment, both in God’s creative gift of our own planet, and in the greater expanses of our relatively small solar system.

In retirement, I have been blessed with the additional time to respond positively to the call to serve on the Outreach Committee. I cannot recall who asked me or the circumstance in which I was asked to serve, but it must have been one of those mysterious activities of the Spirit urging me to respond with a “yes”. I have enjoyed the personal associations with clergy and lay people alike on the committee. It was fun to develop new Christian friendships. We worked through some difficult but rewarding times to discern God’s will in supporting the establishment of new ministries as well as continued efforts with renewing congregations that are struggling financially. Often, the meetings were held in those ministry locations supported by our Synod.

The central message this retired engineer received by visiting and sometimes worshiping at these churches was one of diversity. Of seeing how the Holy Spirit moves and leads a great many Lutheran Christians in many different ways, in widely different settings to a greater understanding of God’s love. I found out that although we share the ELCA name, no two congregations are the same. As I was reminded once during one of our meetings, “diversity is what keeps us from being a club.” We can rejoice in and build on the understanding that mission work takes many different forms and follows many different paths. When we love God, there is much work to be done.

Mission Interpreter Communication

Ken Greble, Mission Interpreter Coordinator

This is our first communication in the Synod monthly newsletter. Here I will try and bring help and hope to each congregation that needs to breathe new life and understanding into the mission work being done because of the mission support dollars that come from the pews, through the Synod and into the world!

We start with a definition of what mission support dollars really are, (I will explore this more deeply next month) *These are the undesignated dollars that your congregation members contribute to the Synod and churchwide body of the ELCA.* These funds are given and entrusted to our leaders to support them in efforts to do God’s work with our church and ministry partners. These leaders are the people we ask to help guide us in the stewardship of these funds, for this purpose. Please keep them in your prayers as the New Year begins. There is amazing work being done by you as a missionary! Yes, each of us can be a missionary when we give to our local congregation

Your mission support dollars are helping everyday in the lives of people like:

- Pastors with programs designed to train and invigorate... these are now being held at Christ United, adjacent to the property that will, Lord willing, become the new Center for Mission & Ministry, a place we all can go to learn, grow and worship.

- People like you and me. Lay members can participate in programs like Lay Ministry Training, Spiritual Formation Education and the Spiritual Direction Practicum. These programs can be life changing because of the fellowship, Christian education and training that is offered.
- The people in the community of Lake Ann, Michigan with a mission development church called Advent Lutheran. This young church now has a membership of approximately 200. Mission starts like this are helped financially through mission partner churches as well as synodical grants. This is money you have helped provide with your giving.
- The people in central Mississippi when, on April 24th, a powerful tornado touched down and traveled across five counties -- over 100 miles. Then torrential rains brought flash flooding to four states, including heavy flooding around Nashville, Tennessee. In all, these storms have been blamed for more than two dozen deaths, and thousands of homes that have been damaged or destroyed. The ELCA, through [Lutheran Disaster Response](#), has provided two \$10,000 emergency response grants for work in Mississippi and Tennessee. These grants helped devastated local organizations get up and going to help area residents.
- ELCA World Hunger has been on the ground in Haiti for many years, providing millions of dollars for relief and development and supporting many programs through local work of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). It's because of this ongoing work and relationships with the LWF and partner organizations like the ACT Alliance (ACT) that the ELCA was on the ground and able to respond immediately. Within days of the earthquake, the ELCA was able to take your gifts and provide food, water, clothing and shelter for people with great need in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

These are just some of the wonderful stories of our church that happen because of God's grace that is reflected in the generosity of people like you. Each week we come together with over 4 million other ELCA Lutherans and Worship, commune, fellowship and share from the abundance that we have. I want each of you to know that because of your giving, all the people involved in the stories outlined above have a little bit of your congregation's love in them.

If you are interested in additional information regarding the Mission Support work being done in the ELCA please visit www.elca.org and search through the site. Or contact me at [kgreble @ aol.com](mailto:kgreble@aol.com)

Ministry to Those Who Have Been in Prison

Pastor Aaron Sorrels, Church in Society Committee

“Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name.” Psalm 142:7
“To free captives from prison, and to release those who sit in darkness.” Isaiah 42:7
“I was in prison and you came to visit me.” Luke 25:36
“Remember those in prison, as if you were their fellow prisoners.” Hebrews 13:3

One of the responses we have to the Gospel is to show care for those who have been imprisoned. This may not be a ministry for every person or every congregation, But if you or your congregation are moved to bring hope and healing to those who “sit in darkness,” then this may be a ministry for you.

Often a congregation may begin in this ministry because someone they know has been imprisoned, or someone has been the victim of a criminal act. Are you aware that most of those imprisoned will one day be released, and many return to prison? If there is something that can be done that can change that path for even one, that act will help change a life and provide greater safety in our communities.

No congregation alone can make these changes in our society. We are all helped in our efforts when we learn from each other and when we work together. Consider the activities and opportunities below. If you are willing, send your responses to me so that our Synod’s Committee on Church in Society can let you know who else is working on similar projects.

Send your email comments to aaron_sorrels@sbcglobal.net. Or mail them to me at St. Thomas Lutheran, P.O. Box 53, Trufant, MI 49347. Thank you.

Which of these comments applies to you?

- *My congregation is not involved in ministry to present or former prisoners.*
- *I am, or I know of someone in my congregation, who is involved. Names?*
- *We minister to someone from our congregation because of a criminal act.*
- *We participate in a program (MPRI, One Church One Offender, Healing Communities or another program-please say more).*
- *We would like to be in contact with churches with similar interests.*
- *We want to be involved but have questions how to begin.*
- *We are involved already and would be glad to help others start.*

Thank you and may God bless you in all of your ministry in Jesus’ name!

Center for Mission & Ministry presents

Facilitating Contemplative Groups - An Ecumenical Formation & Training Program

Mondays, 1-4pm – February through June 2011

Hosted by St. John Lutheran Church, Grayling MI 49738

A program for the formation of facilitators for spiritual direction groups, peer ministry groups, Bible Study or faith sharing groups.

- Learn skills for facilitating “Spirit-filled” and “Spirit-led” small groups.
- A 5-month program of seven 3-hour sessions consisting of theory and practice.

This program also includes a practicum—an opportunity to facilitate a group at a church—outside monthly program time and to present the experience in a confidential setting—a peer group—for prayer and ongoing discernment of the movement of the Holy Spirit in the facilitator as s/he learns the art of contemplative facilitation. The model offered can be adapted to any variety of groups and settings.

A theology of the Holy Spirit is central to the process as is contemplative listening. There are required readings, consisting of articles and two-books, as well as ONE short written reflection PAPER FOR THE FINAL SESSION. Participants are invited into the regular practice of contemplative prayer and discernment as integral to the process of facilitation and personal transformation in Christ. You may wish to register as a team of two or more from the same Church. Visit www.mittensynod.org for more information and to download the registration form.

REAL PEOPLE, REAL HUNGER, REAL HOPE is a hunger conference designed for lay persons, pastors, hunger advocates, hunger contact people, social ministry people, food pantry workers, and anyone interested in alleviating hunger. It will be held on Saturday, 19 March at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Mt. Pleasant, MI from 9:30 to 3:00. Our goal is to invigorate attendees with positive messages, enabling them to share what they’ve learned with their friends, family and church. The keynote speaker and workshop presenter will be Dr. Craig Nesson, Professor of Theology at Wartburg Theological Seminary.

Also on the agenda for the day are a number of workshops, to include: a panel discussion on food pantry best practices, how care of the earth and care for the hungry are connected, hunger advocacy with representatives from Bread for the World and the Lutheran Office of Government Affairs, and creative ways to use information available from ELCA World Hunger. Also featured will be a chancel drama presentation written by Pr. Carl Billings, Jr., and a worship service to include the celebration of the Eucharist.

Registration information will be available shortly. The conference is being planned by the North/West Lower Michigan Synod Hunger Team, with Pr. Erick Johnson (517 782-6081) and Judy Enger (989 835-7211) serving as Co-Chairs.

Young Adult Retreat

March 25 (7 p.m.) – March 27 (2 p.m. or thereabout)

Young Adult Winter Retreat: For post high-school (18) through 35.

A time for fellowship, devotions, planning, and FUN! ALL ARE WELCOME. Invite friends.

Registration due by March 21, 2011

Cost: \$40--includes 2 breakfast, 2 lunch, 1 dinner, and lodging

****\$5 discount if registration and payment are received by March 9, 2011

****\$5 additional if registration and payment are received after March 21.

Bring bedding and personal care items. Bring games. If weather is appropriate and lake is still frozen, maybe some sledding? Bring snacks and drinks. THIS IS A NO ALCOHOL EVENT! If you want to participate in planning, please let me know (juliebailey@mittensynod.org) Join the Facebook group at [Michigan Young Adult Lutheran Organization or a name to be determined](#). Registration form can be found at www.mittensynod.org under Leadership –Young Adult Ministry.

First Call Theological Education Gathering

Registration deadline February 28

The 2011 First Call Gathering of Region 6 will be April 3-5, 2011 at The Lodge at Sawmill Creek Resort in Huron, OH. The 2011 retreat is “Transforming Ministers for Transforming Leaders.” Cost is \$260 for a single room and \$170 for a double meal. Registration includes 2 breakfasts and one dinner. The registration deadline is February 28. Registration forms and information can be found at http://www.mittensynod.org/leadership/pdfs/2010_11/registration_2011.pdf.

Living Water Announces New Executive Director

Rev. David Sprang, President

The Board of Directors of Living Water Ministries, a shared mission of the lower Michigan synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in partnership with the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan, is proud to announce that Christopher J. (C.J.) Clark has been appointed to the position of Executive Director. He will begin work December 15, 2010.

C.J. has served as the director of Stony Lake and Marketing since 2005. In a realigning of positions C.J. will serve as Executive Director and also supervise the summer program at Stony Lake. A new on-site director of Michi-Lu-Ca will be sought. C.J. follows Dan Smith who resigned in August to accept a position as Executive Director of the Cadillac YMCA.

C.J. brings experience in camping ministry, youth ministry, advertising, and leadership that will enhance the mission of Living Water Ministries. We pray that God will continue to bless and guide the mission, vision, and programs of the Living Water as we move into the future together.

Michi-Lu-Ca and Stony Lake Receive ACA Accreditation

Living Water Ministries is proud to announce that both Michi-Lu-Ca Conference Center and Camp, and Stony Lake Lutheran Camp are now American Camping Association (ACA) accredited! Becoming ACA accredited means that these camps have achieved a level of professionalism and safety that is recognized on a national level.

ACA Accreditation means that Michi-Lu-Ca and Stony Lake submitted to a thorough (up to 300 standards) review of its operation by the American Camp Association (ACA), from staff qualifications and training to emergency management. American Camp Association collaborates with experts from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Red Cross, and other youth-serving agencies to assure that current practices at camps reflect the most up-to-date, research-based standards in camp operation. Michi-Lu-Ca, Stony Lake and ACA form a partnership that promotes summers of growth and fun in an environment committed to safety.

ACA helps all accredited camps provide:

- Healthy, developmentally-appropriate activities and learning experiences
- Discovery through experiential education
- Caring, competent role models
- Service to the community and the environment
- Opportunities for leadership and personal growth

For more information about Michi-Lu-Ca and Stony Lake, visit www.elcalivingwater.com.
Registration for camp opens January 15, 2011.



Recipes for biblical engagement

BFI SYNODICAL LEADERSHIP TEAM

IGNATIAN READING OF SCRIPTURE

For this recipe, you will need:

- Bible (especially narrative)
- Imagination

Directions:

1. Pray for the Spirit's shaping.
2. Read the story attentively. Close your eyes and place yourself on the scene in the story. [You can be one of the characters, or just an observer.]
3. Use all five senses: See what you see there, smell what you smell, etc.
4. Let the Spirit open you to experiencing the story, and to hearing God's message for you.

Seeds for the Parish and Administration Matters

[*Seeds for the Parish*](#) is published six times a year, bimonthly. It is distributed without charge to the professional staff and lay leaders of the congregations, synods and regions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Make sure new council members and officers are included in the mailing list. For more information, visit www.elca.org/seeds.

Another helpful resource for congregational leaders is [*Administration Matters*](#), the electronic newsletter published by the ELCA Office of the Secretary. Sign up at www.elca.org under Office of the Secretary, Congregation Administration.

Board of Pensions Offers 2% Discount in 2011

The ELCA Board of Pensions is offering us the opportunity to earn a 2% discount on ELCA health contributions again in 2011. As in 2010, each congregation and organization in our synod will receive a 2% discount on health contributions if 65% of our eligible ELCA-primary plan members complete the confidential Mayo Clinic Health Assessment January 1 – April 30.

If you have ELCA-primary health coverage, this savings depends on you. Take the 2011 Mayo Clinic Health Assessment on the EmbodyHealth web portal at [*www.elcaforwellness.org*](http://www.elcaforwellness.org) January 1 – April 30. We'll be one person closer to 65% participation, and you'll earn \$150 in your personal wellness account to offset out-of-pocket medical costs.

Internal Revenue Service Issues 2011 Mileage Reimbursement Rates

Beginning on Jan. 1, 2011, the standard mileage rates for the use of a car (also vans, pickups or panel trucks) will be:

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