

**Bishop's Report**  
**Northwest Washington Synod Assembly**  
**June 1-2, 2007**

*Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God-- not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*

When I was confirmed, Pastor Norman Ritterling read a specially chosen verse of scripture to each confirmand. Ephesians 2: 8-9 was the verse read for me. I have been thankful ever since for this verse that reminds me to live in the radical grace of God. I also like the New Revised Standard version's translation of verse 10. It reminds us that while we live in the grace of God, it is so that we might live the life that God created for us and that doing good is our way of life.

We live in a time and place that has great difficulty with the reality of grace. We would like to be God for our selves and our time. If the world and our neighbor would only do what I want, then I would be happy. Of course, that is self idolatry. It is also the spirit of the age in which we live.

It is with this reality of God working in and through us, that we are the church. We should not shrink back from proclaiming that God is at work in us. The good works that we do are the good works that God intends to be the way in which we live. It is natural for us to be involved with the marginalized in our world, because God is involved with them and intends that we would be as well. Our witness to the love of God in Christ is what we do. Stewardship is just another name of this reality in our lives.

As I look back on this past year and really the past 6 years of our life together in the Northwest Washington Synod, I am reminded that what we are doing is looking at the grace of God at work among us.

### **New Ministries**

In 2004 we set aside significant money for the creation of new ministries and the transformation of existing ministries. Since then we have added additional money that came from the closure of St. Stephen's congregation. The result is the beginning of several new initiatives in this area. Currently the potential new ministries in this synod are:

Church of the Apostles, Seattle  
El Camino de Emaus, Burlington

---

Indonesian Lutheran Fellowship, Seattle  
Living Truth, Bothell  
Church of the Beloved, Edmonds  
Congregation of Steadfast Love, Seattle  
Grace Chinese Lutheran Church of South King County, Renton

These are not just stand alone ministries. They are being started with the support of the Skagit-Isle Cluster, Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church, First Lutheran of Bothell, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Edmonds Lutheran Church, the Compass Center and other congregations in the Sno-King cluster, St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, Renton and Lakeridge Lutheran Church, Seattle

In addition to these efforts we are looking at ministry with the Chinese population in Sammamish with Sammamish Hills Lutheran Church. Transformational ministries or new ministries are being supported at Shepherd of the Valley, Startup, Holy Cross, Bellevue, Faith, Everett, Zion, Everett, Christ the King, Snohomish and Trinity, Lynnwood. We are also involved in exciting new possibilities at the former St. James in White Center and with St. Matthew, Renton and the Compass Center at the site of the former Renton Lutheran church.

In all of this we are developing a track record to show we can do this good work that God has prepared for us. We can reach out to people who do not speak English or come from Northern Europe. We can reach out to youth who are inspired by the ancient message of the church in new and different ways. We can see ministry in ways other than traditional congregations in communities that will respond to the words and deeds inspired by the gospel.

It will not be long before the funds we have set aside are gone. We will need to be creative in how we fund this ongoing work. This is not just the work of larger congregations; this is the work that God has given all of us to do.

### **Raising up new leaders**

At the same 2004 Assembly we set aside funds for Lay Theological Education. It has taken us a while to give vision to this action. The Lay Theological Education task force is ready to unveil their work. This will be a combination of grants to congregations and task force initiated classes throughout the synod. You will be hearing more about this, but I want to commend the task force for their work and endorse their proposals to you. This is an exciting opportunity for us to share this educational work together.

We also have been increasing the number of candidates for rostered leadership from this synod. Currently there are approximately 70 people in candidacy for three of the rosters of the ELCA, associate in ministry, diaconal minister and ordained minister. Congregations of the synod are to be commended

for the intentional way in which people are being invited to hear God's call to ministry.

A significant issue for the future is how shall we pay for educating our rostered leaders? The size of debt that newly ordained, commissioned, or consecrated leaders bring to their first call is significant. The closure of St. Stephen's congregation enabled the Synod Council to establish a scholarship fund through the Fund for Leaders in Mission. The proceeds of these funds will be available to students from this synod. At the moment the fund has \$50,000 in principle, so the interest is not large. Increased contributions to the principle will allow us to help our candidates get the education we require.

We are also moving away from the Region 1 multi-synodical candidacy committee approach. As we have grown in raising up candidates this process does not serve us as well as it did in the past. We can and should know our candidates better at each step of the process. In that way we can support and challenge our candidates in ways that result in better leaders for the whole church.

We know that in the coming years we will see an increased number of clergy retirements. We are not experiencing a "clergy shortage" in this synod. Actually the ELCA has a limited shortage if pastors without calls were willing to serve where there are currently vacancies. The truth is that our location is helping to keep us with a good supply of potential nominees for our anticipated vacancy rate. Congregations in the synod seem to recognize the importance of compensating good pastors at adequate levels and the synod personnel committee has been diligent in studying and tracking compensation guidelines so we are able to attract and keep good pastors. How we help the whole church deal with increased clergy retirements is an important question of mission for us and the rest of the church.

### **Healthy Leaders**

As I have been visiting congregations I have been reporting what the Conference of Bishops heard from John Kapanke about the current state of clergy health. The numbers are not good. Much of the increased costs related to health care are the result of life style illnesses. Weight, blood pressure, diet, lack of exercise and stress all affect the health of our leaders and the costs of our insurance program.

Members of our congregations can and should ask about their pastor's health. Time for devotions, prayer, exercise and Sabbath should be part of the daily life of our leaders. It should be expected that pastors will take time for their families and their health. I encourage you to ask your pastor or to ask your pastoral colleague what they are doing for exercise and healthy living.

If we continue on the current trend, the cost of health care will soon exceed the mission support benevolence of many of our congregations. I would hope that

our interest in healthy leaders would be based on our care for each other. It appears that our budgeting may also play a role in this initiative.

Expect to see and hear more about this in the coming months. This will come from the Board of Pensions and from the Synod office.

### **Mission Partnership support**

When our members give their tithes and offerings in worship it is the assumption of our church that these offerings are to be shared among all three expressions of the church, congregation, synod and churchwide. Congregations forward a portion of these funds to the Synod, who then forwards a portion to Churchwide. The expectation in the forming of the ELCA was that 45% would be used in Synod and 55% would be passed on to Churchwide. Those synods not forwarding 55% needed to get a waiver approved by the Church Council to pass on a lower percentage.

Later the process was changed to annual consultations that again saw the church council approving the pattern of giving partnership support from synods to churchwide. The simple fact is that the churchwide expression has received roughly \$81 million dollars each year since the formation of the ELCA. Factoring in inflation, we see that partnership support is declining in real dollars.

In this Synod we are seeing a slight decline each year since our high year of 2000. We have been consistently giving 45% of the partnership support from congregations to the churchwide organization. The proposed budget for 2008 begins a process of increasing our percentage by .5% per year until we reach a 50% level. Thus next year we will be forwarding 45.5% to churchwide. The work of the churchwide expression is our work, just as the work of the synod and congregation is our work.

We see areas where the synod could expand its ministry in support of congregations and in developing new ministries. This will remain only a dream until the congregational support of synod and churchwide expands as well. For the past two years I have advanced the idea that we should add an additional bishop's assistant who would be responsible for connecting and networking the gifts and talents of our congregational members with the needs of the various congregations in the synod. This view of the synod as the connecting tissue between congregations is the direction I believe the synod expression of this church needs to move with some intentionality.

To establish this position would require roughly \$200,000 more in our budget than we currently are proposing. This would cover the 45.5% share that would be passed on to churchwide and the salary, benefits, office costs and program costs of such a position. That translates into roughly \$1,900 per congregation or \$4.25 per baptized member above what is currently shared. This is very doable if we

have the will. I want to challenge us to consider this extension of our mutual support for congregational ministries.

## **Region 1**

We have been blessed with strong cooperation with the other synods of this region and with the presence of deployed churchwide staff in the Region 1 office. I was a part of the planning team that established the original vision for the Regional Center for Mission. I am also one who would say that we need to be sure that we are adapting Region 1 to fit the current needs of the congregations, synods and churchwide expressions of the church. It is clear that there will continue to be transitions in the structure and services provided through the region. We are still committed to sharing in the areas that make sense missionally and economically.

Some of the programs that were delivered through the region are now the responsibility of the synod. Our Youth Board has picked up the responsibility of our common youth work. The Candidacy Committee is now fully responsible for supporting our candidates for ministry. We will be studying how the multi-cultural ministry of our synod and the churchwide organization transitions in the coming year.

We will continue to share information on programs, pastoral mobility, and shared ministries through the region. The financial services office is unique to this region. This work is highly valued among our partner synods in the region.

## **Thanks be to God**

All of this is a sign of God's continued grace in and among us. We now look to those places where we are to do the good that God intends. I am especially thankful to God for the amazing gifted people who are members of this synod and its congregations. God has blessed us with ample resources of people, talent, and finances to do these good works.

Please thank the members of the Synod Council who serve on your behalf. They spend one Saturday every other month in meetings to direct the work of this synod. They are charged with doing the work you are doing at this assembly in between assembly meetings. They will take the budget you adopt and turn it into services for congregations and for service to the community. They will also match the dreams of this assembly with the financial realities of our stewardship. They are essential to our common work.

Please thank the other officers of this synod for their faithful service. Larry Johnson, associate in ministry, is completing his first year as Vice President. Larry brings his love of the church and his can do attitude to leading the council and the executive committee. Pastor Wes Howell is also one year into his term as secretary.

Wes is responsible for recording the minutes of our meetings and for tracking and proposing actions related to the rosters of this synod.

I want to single out thanks for our treasurer, Richard Bridges. Apparently some have seen our banter as a sign that we may not like each other. That is not true; Richard is a good friend, even if he does come from Texas. He also is a faithful steward of the funds placed under his care. Please thank him for his work these past three years.

I enjoy working with the team that we have assembled in the synod office. I have had great enjoyment poking fun at Pastor Jan Nesse/Leistikow as she planned her wedding this past year. I also value her leadership, partnership and friendship in sharing the work of this office. Elaine Harrison continues to be the voice and face of the synod office as you call or stop by. Her hospitality and her loyalty to the work of those around her is a joy. We have added the roster database and the candidacy database to her job, so she is getting to know all of us better and helping us to know each other. Margaret Spatafore gets all of those calendar issues for both Jan's calendar and my calendar. In spite of my frequent trips into her office for just one more bit of information, she keeps us organized and focused on the tasks before us. Margit Peiffle is the longest tenured member of the staff. Soundings, e-soundings, Spirit and other publications are her creations. If you want something publicized in this synod, you should contact Margit. With Jim Goeben, Margit has overseen the revamping of our website. In my mind the website is the first place one should go when looking for information about this synod and its activities.

Finally, I thank God for the trust you have placed in me in this office. This assembly is not what I expected it would be. No one expected the election process would turn out as it has. I am aware that voices that would have been heard in a normal election process are not empowered this year. That adds to our responsibility to listen to what is being said in our conversations together. I am still humbled by this call. It is only with our work together that this ministry can be accomplished. Actually it is only by God's grace that we can live and work together. "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."

Thanks be to God

Wm Chris Boerger  
Bishop