

Report of The Reverend Dr. Gary M. Wollersheim, Bishop

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

Even though this last year has been challenging in terms of the economy, in many ways our ministries across the Northern Illinois Synod have been richly blessed. We have much to be thankful for. In this year's written report, I will reflect on some of the blessings which God has graciously bestowed upon us.

Generous Congregations

I am aware that many congregations across the Northern Illinois Synod made significant sacrifices to generously support the work of the Synod and Churchwide Ministries. For some congregations, because of the economy, it was a stretch to keep their pledge unchanged from last year. Others were able to even increase their commitment for 2009. The congregations of the Northern Illinois Synod which gave to Synod and Churchwide about 15% or more in Mission Support include: First-Prophetstown, St. James-Forreton, St. Mark-Polo, St. Paul-Sterling, Christ-Belvidere, Prince of Peace-Rockton, Bethany-Crystal Lake, First-DeKalb, First-Kirkland, First-Princeton, St. John-Mendota, St. John-Princeton, St. John-Somonauk, Bethel-Stronghurst, Faith-Wataga, Grace-Knoxville, Augustana-Andover, First-Moline, Peace-Port Byron, Grace-Woodstock, Trinity-Rockford, Trinity-Galesburg, St. John-Rock Island, Shepherd of the Prairie-Huntley, Immanuel-Amboy, St. James-Rock Island, Bethany-Woodhull, Trinity-Mt. Morris, Calvary-New Windsor, Salem-Sycamore, St. Paul-Streator, St. John-Pearl City, Bethlehem-DeKalb, St. John-Sterling, Grace-Opheim, and First-Geneseo.

Bishop Mark Hanson

It is an honor to welcome the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Rev. Mark Hanson, to our Synod Assembly this year. Bishop Hanson is also the President of the Lutheran World Federation. He is recognized around the world as one of the most influential religious leaders of our time. I have had the privilege of working with Bishop Hanson on many projects and accompanying him on many journeys. He is humble, brilliant and faithful, and always has the heart of a pastor. Bishop Hanson's wife, Ione, is a partner to Mark in life and in ministry; she often travels with him especially on mission trips to other countries.

Green

In our Mission Gatherings this last year, we focused on "Going Green". The Synod teamed up with Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Center for eight meetings across Northern Illinois. Thanks to the hard work of Russ Senti, George Davis, Pastors Jeff Schlesinger and Don Knowles and others, the Gatherings were very well received. In each Conference, notes were taken on best practices in congregations. Here is an example of ideas from the South Conference. For a listing of best practices, please go to the Northern Illinois Synod website www.nisynod.org.

- Several churches are using printer paper more than once making sure that they print on both sides before recycling the paper.
- St. John Lutheran in Peru has recently completed a \$40,000 window upgrade project replacing some of the old windows with double pane ones and taking out some windows completely--replacing them with walls to cut down on the energy loss in their fellowship hall.
- St. Paul Lutheran in Streator commissioned their WELCA ladies to create a logo and have that logo put on shopping bags to sell to congregational members for \$20. The bags have sold like hotcakes. Please send Kitty Rhoades an Email at fatcat3@ivnet.com to learn more about this joint greening and evangelism project at her church.
- One church reuses their Sunday morning bulletin 6 consecutive weeks before making a new one changing out only the announcements page. Also, they have reduced the size and number of inserts and pages of the bulletin.

- Many churches are considering getting rid of styrofoam cups and using bio-degradable paper ones or, better yet, sugar cane ones like we had at the Mission Gatherings.
- One church made 760 quilts from recycled clothes then donated all of them to Lutheran World Relief. They also use recycled “filler” for their quilts.
- One church has replaced all their bulbs with CFL’s saving the church money and labor because the bulbs don’t need to be replaced as often as the old ones.

We now have trained representatives in each Conference who are available to do energy audits of church buildings. If you would like more information about an energy audit, contact Mr. George Davis, Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Center at 815/732-2220.

Book of Faith

At last year’s Synod Assembly, Dr. Diane Jacobson kicked off the Book of Faith Initiative in Northern Illinois. This was followed by Dr. Matthew Marohl’s presentations at the Congregational Resourcing Event (CRE) in March. At this year’s Assembly we are pleased to have Dr. Ralph Klein as our Bible Study Leader.

“The Book of Faith initiative invites the whole church to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered and sent by the Word.”

The Mission Gatherings this fall will focus on the Book of Faith. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend:

- North Conference: Thursday, September 10 – Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Rockford
- Northeast Conference: Thursday, September 17 – Salem, Sycamore
- West Conference: Tuesday, September 22 – First, Moline
- South Conference: Tuesday, October 20 – St. John’s, Mendota
- Central Conference: Thursday, October 22 – Immanuel, Dixon
- Northwest Conference: Tuesday, October 27 – Prince of Peace, Freeport
- East Conference: Thursday, November 5 – Cross of Glory, Homer Glen
- Southwest Conference: Sunday, November 15 – Messiah, Galva

Dr. Matthew Marohl and Ms. Elizabeth Martin are serving as co-chairs of the Bishop’s Task Force for the Book of Faith initiative.

Wellness/wholeness

The Board of Pensions of the ELCA has initiated a wellness emphasis which our Synod has enthusiastically adapted. It is first directed to Rostered leaders and their families and then hopefully in the future to all Synod members. There are several aspects to being well including: spiritual, financial, vocational, intellectual, social/interpersonal, emotional and physical.

The Board of Pensions offered a financial incentive in 2008 to Rostered Leaders who took the Mayo Clinic Health Assessment. Because 75% of the Rostered leaders in the Northern Illinois Synod took the Health Assessment the congregations across the Synod received a 2% discount in the cost of medical insurance through the BOP. Only 7 of the 65 synods made this benchmark. We are grateful to the Bishop’s Task Force on Wellness for their good work in this area.

Dedication of the Arusha Lutheran Medical Centre

On December 11, 2008, the Arusha Lutheran Medical Centre was dedicated. Mr. Ron Gustafson from Grace Lutheran Church in Loves Park represented the Northern Illinois Synod at this important event. The name “Northern Illinois Synod” is inscribed on the cornerstone because of our support of this new hospital.

Churchwide Assembly

At this year's Synod Assembly we will be discussing two important items coming up at the Churchwide Assembly in August: The Proposed Social Statement from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality, "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" and the "Report and Recommendations on Ministry Policies" also from the Task Force. For this discussion we are planning to go into a "Quasi Committee of the Whole" which is a way of having a more relaxed conversation in terms of parliamentary rules. During this time we will take a non-binding vote on these matters and communicate the results to the ELCA Assembly which will be held in August.

Rostered Leaders New to the Synod

It is a joy to welcome the following pastors who are new to our Synod:

Pastor Joshua Auchenbach
Pastor Stan Bockwoldt
Pastor Katie Gallagher
Pastor Ken Gibson
Pastor Ben Ingelson
Pastor Keith Johnson
Pastor Dawn Keenan
Pastor Norwood Knutson
Pastor Frank Langholf
Pastor Dustin Lenz
Pastor Elizabeth Mascal (to be ordained at the Assembly)
Pastor Kurt Nordby
Pastor Vicki Sauter (to be ordained at the Assembly)

Roster Anniversaries

The following Rostered leaders in our Synod will be celebrating anniversaries of ordination and consecration this year. Please consider recognizing them in some way in the congregation.

5 Years: Rev. Jonathan Black, Rev. Nichole Johnson, Rev. Pat Esker, and Rev. Karen Capel
10 Years: Rev. Scott Schmidt and Ms. Karin Graddy
15 Years: Rev. Amy Nyman, Rev. Marcia Strahl, and Rev. Michael Thomas
20 Years: Rev. Kevin Weeks, Rev. David Schweppe, Rev. Kathleen Burkheimer, and Ms. Susan Friesen
25 Years: Rev. Brant Clements, Rev. Jeffrey King, Rev. Lee Laaveg, Rev. John Swanson and Ms. Marilyn Gasbarra
30 Years: Rev. Denver Bitner, Rev. Carl Rasmussen, Rev. David Nygard, Rev. Philip Peterson, Rev. Mark Helge, and Ms. Myrna Andersen
35 Years: Rev. Paul Johnson, Rev. Karl Otto, Rev. Kenneth Storck, and Rev. David Ufkes
40 Years: Rev. Herbert Priester, Rev. Norwood Knutson, Rev. Dennis Heaney, Rev. Paul Wold, and Mr. Frederick Becker
45 Years: Rev. Loren Nielsen, Rev. Orlyn Huwe, and Rev. Carlyle Smith
50 Years: Rev. Franklin Samuelson and Rev. Donald Lavelle
55 Years: Rev. Virgil Juliot, Rev. Jan Bengston, and Rev. Nolan Watson
60 Years: Rev. William Wittig and Rev. Hubert Ahnquist

Synod Council

I give God thanks for our excellent Northern Illinois Synod Council: DiAnne Beynon, Mic Brooks, Beth Nelson Chase, Karen Dowsett, Gary Erickson, Jim Hankins, Bob Hansen, Robin Johnson, Kim Lee-Brown, Mark Luepke, Rick Meier, Randy Mullin, Esther Prabhakar, Kevin Rogers, George Sanchez, and Janet Wold.

The following members of our Synod Council will be retiring or seeking re-election at this year's Assembly: Beth Nelson Chase, Jim Hankins, Rick Meier, Randy Mullin, and Kevin Rogers. New council members will

be elected at this Assembly. Included in those retiring is our Synod Vice President Esther Prabhakar. I have served with many wonderful people throughout my ministry but none more humble, faithful and prayerful than Esther. We will be honoring Esther during my Report at the Assembly.

Synod Staff

I am blessed to work with a dedicated and faithful Synod Staff.

Full time Assistants to the Bishop: Ms. Sandra Musch and Pastor Jeffrey Clements

Assistant to the Bishop & Director of Evangelical Mission (deployed by Churchwide): Pastor Kurt Nordby

Part-time Conference Assistants to the Bishop:

Pastor Michel Clark, Deaconess Cheryl Erdmann, Pastor Kurt Hansen, Pastor Tim Kenyon, Pastor Tom Larsen, Pastor Jay Quinn, and Pastor Christine Stienstra

Part-time Assistant to the Bishop for Candidacy: Pastor Barb Rapp

Part-time Communication Director: Ms. Karin Graddy

Part-time Youth Ministry Coordinator: Diaconal Minister Mary Lasits

Support Staff: Ms. June Cain, Bookkeeper & Administrative Assistant to Pastor Jeffrey Clements; Ms. Nancy Corey, Synod Registrar and Administrative Assistant to Pastor Kurt Nordby; Ms. Judi Fields, Receptionist/Administrative Assistant to Sandra Musch and Pastor Barb Rapp (Candidacy); and Ms. Julie Lewis, Administrative Assistant to the Bishop.

Where's Polly? That is what I hear each time Polly doesn't come with me to a Synod function-which actually is rare. Polly's ministry among us includes prayer, supporting spouses, encouragement, keeping track of me, and much more. Thanks Polly for your partnership in ministry!

It is a privilege to serve as your pastor. Thank you for your prayers, encouragement and kindness.

In Christ,

Bishop Gary Wollersheim