

Wednesday, October 17, 2007

Greetings, Sisters and Brothers in Christ. I want to give you an update on some matters of importance.

### **Transitions in Synod Ministries:**

Pastor Dave Peters will be finishing up his work as Executive Director of Lutheran Social Services of Montana in October, and will begin full-time Synod Staff work on November 1. Pastor Peters will divide his time between the Synod Office in Great Falls, and a Billings office at St. John's Lutheran Ministries.

Pastor Shelley Wickstrom has left Christ the King in Bozeman and began her new position as Region I Coordinator, starting October 1.

NRIT is in transition, with Dr. Laurie Jungling serving as the Interim Director for 2007-2008. The NRIT Advisory Committee will be looking at future staffing options as it meets on December 7.

LSSMT is in transition. The Board, comprised of both ELCA and LCMS membership, voted to transfer management of LSSMT to St. John's Lutheran Ministries, pending a final vote in December. Services will remain the same, but the administration will be streamlined.

Synod Congregations in Transition A listing of congregations in transition is available on the web site, [www.montanasynod.org](http://www.montanasynod.org).

### **What Could \$40,000 Do?**

A month ago I sent out an email asking what \$400 (the Montana homeowners' tax rebate) could do. I hope that a lot of you were challenged to find creative ways to use that \$400 for ministry. Now I have a new challenge for you, one that could save us collectively from \$30,000-\$40,000. The ELCA Board of Pensions is asking all members to take a health assessment survey online. It is anonymous. The BOP doesn't know who takes it, and we don't either. If 75% of the Montana Synod's BOP members and spouses take the survey, we will all save 2% on our contributions. Yes, they will actually lower our rates if we do this survey! This is a stewardship issue, friends, and one we ought not to ignore. In addition to this savings for our employers, taking the survey gives individuals access to additional money for health and wellness-related expenses. The BOP mailed out packets of information on this new program. Find it and do it! (Please.)

### **Some Synod Issues and Opportunities:**

"The harvest is plenty, but the laborers are few!" We need some new blood on some of our committees. We are reorganizing the Evangelism Committee, and particularly welcome people to be a part of that ministry. The Evangelism Committee prepares the prayer calendar, advises congregations and the synod on evangelism issues, and is responsible for a major congregational event. We have some funding to do another "Growing in God's Field" event in the fall of 2008, but we need people to do the planning. Growing in God's Field was a major turning point for a number of our Synod's congregations, and we would like to be able to offer it again. The first event, in 2002, was staffed entirely by volunteers. We are looking for some again! Contact either the Synod Office or Pr. Kim Wilker, chair of the Synod's Mission and Outreach Committee ([klwrlj@aol.com](mailto:klwrlj@aol.com)).

We also need some new people to train to be coaches for congregations doing Natural Church Development. This is a marvelous opportunity to be involved in a congregation's growth and new life. Contact our office or Darius Larsen, Mission Director ([dariuslarsen@msn.com](mailto:dariuslarsen@msn.com)).

We have received a copy of the sermon Bishop Mark Hanson preached at the Bishop's Installation, and it will be on the Montana Synod web site.

We have in our office copies of the lectures given at the Synod Assembly by Dr. Patricia O'Connell Killen. We can email them to you. Let us know.

The Intent Forms have been sent out, and we await your responses.

The Synod Yearbook/Directory is in process and should be in your hands by mid-November.

### **Church and Society:**

SCHIP: I have sent letters to Senators Max Baucus and Jon Tester and to Representative Denny Rehberg thanking them for their support of SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program.) Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson has written a letter to Congress commending the SCHIP program and referring to our ELCA Social Statement: "Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor." He quotes: *"Our search for justice is a call from God, a concern especially for the 'rights of the needy' (Jeremiah 5:28). Because health is central to personal well-being and functioning in society, a just society is one that supports the health of all its members. Thus, our common effort to provide access to health care for all is a matter of social justice for all people."*

Iraq War: The ELCA Churchwide Assembly voted to oppose "any escalation of the war" in Iraq, and asked the church to call on the US government to "take immediate and comprehensive steps to end the violence and establish a peaceful, stable, and just society in that country."

In addition, the Assembly urged ELCA congregations and ministries to provide a "welcoming and supporting environment for returning military veterans." Montana has a higher than average number of troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we have opportunity for ministry here. And we have some excellent resources to help you out.

### **Ecumenical and Interfaith Issues:**

Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson wrote an open letter in response to a 29-page letter from 138 global Muslim leaders calling for Christians and Muslims to work together for peace. You can find the text of Bishop Hanson's letter on the ELCA web site, [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org). We will be addressing Christian-Muslim relations at our Synod Assembly and Theological Conference June 6-8, as part of our attention to global issues.

I have been invited to attend the meeting of the Global Christian Forum in Nairobi, Kenya, November 4-9. There will be about 250 participants from around the world, representing a broad range of Christians from Pentecostals to Orthodox, from Friends to Salvation Army, from

Roman Catholic to Charismatic. I will be one of 10 people from the Lutheran tradition, joining colleagues from Sweden, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Chile, Germany, Norway and Indonesia. This Global Forum is an experiment in a new way to do ecumenism, focusing less on structure and more on what God's mission is for Christians all over the world. I ask you to pray for this gathering, and to keep me in prayer as well.

**Gratitude:**

As I have visited around the synod these first six weeks I have been met with goodwill and a positive spirit. And I have been so touched by people telling me that they are praying for me. As I checked into a flight at the airport the gate agent told me that she prays for me. That is so powerful! Thank you all. I pray for all our leaders, all our congregations and ministries, too. Prayer is what keeps us connected. Let us never forget that.

I look forward to meeting with you over the coming weeks and months. And I ask you to keep the church in prayer as we do our work and move forward in the Gospel.

If you come by our office on the south side of the building, you'll notice that we have a new sign. On it is the ELCA's new tagline, "God's work. Our hands." That is what we are about.

Peace and blessings!

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